

DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY

Radio Drama at the Crossroads

The history and contemporary context of radio
drama at the BBC

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Abstract

Radio played an important but undervalued role in the development of 20th century drama. The BBC was first in the field in 1924 and, with the technological advance of Dramatic Control Panel, quickly created a wholly radiogenic form far more experimental than contemporary theatre or film. The age of experiment was over by 1930 and, though the secondary forms of dramatisation and adaptation came into their own, the single radio play became increasingly theatrical and ultimately unsatisfactory in a sound-only medium. The 1950s, however, saw the rebirth of the radiogenic radio play, not only on the minority Third Programme but across all channels, with radio for the first time nurturing the talents that would go on to achieve eminence in theatre and television. The resultant paradigm of high dramatic art combined with straightforward narrative entertainment, produced in bulk, enabled BBC radio drama to resist the challenge of television and continues, broadly, to the present day.

Whilst other recent studies have revisited the early history of BBC radio drama, this thesis sets out to reassess the entire development of the BBC model from 1924 to the last “event” radio drama, John Arden’s *Pearl*, in 1978. Consideration is given to significant radio drama landmarks in other countries, primarily those national broadcasters that followed the BBC model. The revised historical narrative is illustrated with case studies of plays chosen to demonstrate the step-change under discussion but also to indicate the quality of dramatic literature that has been “lost” in this under-researched field. The BBC Written Archives have yielded a considerable amount of material that has not previously been discussed. Similarly, recorded radio plays from the National Sound Archive are considered as a research tool.

The thesis concludes with a detailed survey of BBC radio drama in 2006 comparing this with a sample of the output of the BBC’s main rivals in the field and considers (with input from the current Head of Radio Drama) the condition of the contemporary BBC product and the challenges it faces in its ninth decade.

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Chapter 1: Radio drama at the crossroads

1.1 Introduction

As radio drama entered its ninth decade, few would have argued that not only the form but also its principal platform stood at a significant crossroads. That most ardent contemporary champion of radio Gillian Reynolds began her review of 2004 with the assertion that “Listeners, viewers and media-watchers will look at what happened in 2004, on air and off, to see where the end of the BBC began.”¹

Reynolds’ theme, of course, was the Gilligan affair and the criticisms of the BBC found by Lord Hutton in his subsequent report. Reynolds feared that, with charter renewal due in 2006, a vengeful government would exact a fatal price. “If the BBC loses the licence fee...” she concluded, “we will lose the kind of programmes only the BBC makes.” Prime amongst that unique programming, inevitably, was radio drama.

Actuality had caused the controversy, yet drama was in line to pay the price because drama is more expensive than pre-recorded music and, in the present media-saturated age, less prestigious than newscasting. Recorded music has always been cheap, news important, but from the 1920s to the 1970s drama was the prestige radio product, not only in the UK but around the world. In the 1930s, for example, American commercial networks were willing to reserve primetime slots for unsponsored original drama in a quest for intellectual credibility.

In its first fifty years, radio drama was itself controversial: Reginald Berkeley’s *Machines* (1927), for example, withheld from the airwaves on the orders of John Reith, or Orson Welles’ dramatisation of H G Wells’ *War of the Worlds* for CBS in 1938. To a greater or lesser extent drama will always be controversial; if not actually offensive, it should at least be talked about. In that respect it could be argued that radio drama at the BBC became theoretically expendable because in its second half-century it had lost its controversy.

And yet while other broadcasters around the world have abandoned radio drama entirely, BBC Radio 4 still offers an absolute minimum of a play, a serial and a soap opera episode every weekday. The Corporation's longest-serving Head of Drama always referred to radio drama as a "Cinderella" form² and could not have been more wrong. Simply stated, BBC radio drama has been and remains the biggest market for the original single play that has ever existed. In Athens, in the 5th century BC, Sophocles and Aristophanes wrote all their plays for two annual festivals; in Elizabethan London Shakespeare and twenty or so other professional playwrights wrote for less than a dozen theatres that opened and closed on a regular basis; but in the first decade of the 21st century the *Afternoon Play* slot alone transmits in the order of 180 new plays every year.

Thus the first aim of this study is to undertake a critical, contextual history of the development of radio drama, primarily but not exclusively in Britain, determine and discuss the various forms that radio drama has adopted, and finally to compare and contrast those findings with the contemporary model.

Whilst Crook and Beck have successfully undermined the received history of British radio drama – essentially Val Gielgud's selective account of his early years as Head of Drama, uncritically endorsed by Briggs – no one has yet confronted the artistic anomaly whereby the type of play advocated by Gielgud (theatrical, naturalistic, generalist) became, after 1950, the sort of drama Gielgud loathed (radiogenic, audience-specific). This study therefore proposes an alternative line of artistic development through the Northern Region and the dramatic feature, and considers in some detail Gielgud's loss of authority following peripheral involvement in the *Caesar's Mistress* scandal of 1948 and his hubristic *Party Manners* (1950).

Equally, whilst Whitehead has undertaken an invaluable literary appraisal of the Third Programme, the role of radio in the development of modern drama as a whole has never previously been considered. Samuel Beckett, for example, made his name in the theatre but developed his mature technique entirely on radio. Indeed, academic and critical neglect of the radio play has resulted in a forgotten dramatic literature without which a coherent understanding of late 20th century drama is simply not possible. Thus the third and final aim of this study is to attempt an initial overview – a sampling – of

the surprisingly large *corpus* of radio drama that survives in print and archive awaiting further research.

1.2 Literature review

Every commentator on radio drama remarks upon the paucity of the literature. The field, such as it is, is practitioner-led and, in the British context, wholly dominated by one practitioner, to the extent that no alternative view, scholarly or general, was published whilst the individual was still alive. The dominant practitioner was Val Gielgud, Head of BBC Radio Drama from 1929 to 1963 and even a quarter of a century after his death anyone who writes about British radio drama as a literary form can be broadly characterised as either pro- or anti-Gielgud. Those who favour Gielgud tend to do so uncritically; those who oppose him tend to do so vehemently.

Gielgud's position, expressed without significant variance across three guides to the form, a 'history' that remains the key work in the field, and three tranches of autobiography, was that British radio drama has always been the world's best yet is far inferior to the stage form and has been fated from the outset to be superseded by television. Gielgud's attitude to the original radio play – that is to say a play wholly conceived for sound broadcasting rather than adapted from another dramatic form or dramatised from a novel – was ambiguous. He always believed that radiogenic plays were both possible and desirable – that, after all, is the purpose of his three 'how-to' books (1932, 1946 and 1948), all of which include examples of his own radio originals – but by the mid 1930s he had more or less given up hope of securing an adequate supply.^a

The passage of time has overtaken Gielgud's maxims regarding the impact of television and, to an extent, British dominance of the form; however subsequent studies, of which there are but a handful, tend to endorse his belief in the inferiority of radio to

^a Take for example his comments to *The Guardian*, published March 11 1936 (p. 12): "As to obtaining original radio plays, it must be recognised that the number of first-class writers was exceedingly small and the market for their work exceedingly large. [...] It was certainly the BBC's business to encourage radio playwrights when possible, but they could not accept second or third rate work simply because it was specially written for them."

stage by arguing the case of exceptions. The contributors to Drakakis (1981) argue that the radio work of certain individuals, most of them better known for their output in other fields, achieved distinction. Guralnick (1996) takes a similar line in discussing the radio plays of three theatrical giants, Beckett, Pinter and Stoppard. Pinter and Stoppard started their careers in radio but went on to greater success in theatre and film. Beckett's case is different: recruited to radio when he was already the most discussed playwright of his day, he used the form to create something very different to his theatre work which then shaped his subsequent stage plays. Even so, scholars, practitioners or critics prepared to argue that radio plays can be works of art in their own right, that certain gifted writers only wrote works of genius for radio and have therefore been unjustly overlooked, or that radio offers a medium more suited to certain dramatic subjects than any other, are rare indeed. Rodger (1982) is to all intents and purposes alone in describing a radiogenic form deriving from the dramatic feature. Some writers of radiogenic originals – Louis MacNeice, Henry Reed and Dylan Thomas, all at one time or another Features staff – are discussed in Drakakis and Whitehead (1989), but predominantly from a literary standpoint, focussing on their use of verse rather than their exploitation of radio's most dramatic aspects, silence and invisibility. Arnheim (1936) and McWhinnie (1959) both consider radio as a medium for art and the potential of radio drama to attain the status of art. Arnheim, however, postulates a form more akin to modern acoustic art or German New *Hörspiele*, in which sound rather than speech achieves the artistic effect, and McWhinnie's description of the radiophonic effects created for his production of Beckett's *All That Fall* differs markedly from what can be heard on the recently-issued recordings. Augaitis and Lander (1994), Kahn and Whitehead (1994) and Weiss (1995) all concern themselves with sound art, some of which is also drama.

Gielgud therefore tended to rely on adapted stage plays, dramatised novels and original radio plays that emulated those forms with heavy reliance on dialogue and strong narrative drive. These plays were enormously popular in their day – it must always be borne in mind that no British drama audience has ever equalled the regular audience for Saturday Night Theatre in the 1940s and 1950s – and remain the core BBC radio drama model today. However, these are not the plays regarded as classics of radio form, *Under Milk Wood* being by far the best known, which derived from a model

developed in the English regions which Gielgud always argued against and were principally broadcast on the Third Programme where Gielgud had no influence. Gielgud's character was such that he had no interest in areas where he had no control, thus the first element of what might be called "the Gielgud problem" is that he does not discuss such plays or allow their success to influence his view of the form.

Only one other full-length consideration of radio drama was published during Gielgud's time in office, that of Felix Felton (1949). Felton was a Gielgud protégé and unsurprisingly echoed Gielgud's views. He does, however, provide a useful trans-channel snapshot of the dominance of adapted stage plays broadcast during 1948-1949.^b

Gielgud's *British Radio Drama, 1922-1956* (1957) purports to be a history of the BBC form but is in fact an account of Gielgud's three decades in charge of it. In fairness, he may not have been responsible for the misleading title and he makes it clear that in describing events before his appointment in January 1929 he relies on the recollection of others, principally his long-serving deputy, Howard Rose. Alan Beck and Tim Crook, the leading contemporary authorities on British radio drama, discuss Gielgud's motivation, the errors that result from his anecdotal methodology and the consequences of those errors for broadcasting historians in their online studies *The Invisible Play: BBC Radio Drama 1922-1928* (Beck 2000a) and *Val Gielgud and the BBC* (Crook 1999d). This second element of the Gielgud problem arises from uncritical acceptance of Gielgud's version by subsequent authorities. For example:

In January of that year [1924] R E Jeffrey produced the first play actually written for broadcasting – *Danger*, by Richard Hughes, in the ingenious setting of a coal-mine. This brief but effective tragedy was followed by a comedy, *Light and Shade*, the first of radio plays [sic] written by L du Garde Peach, who was later to make so large and distinguished a contribution to Drama of the Air.
[Gielgud 1957: 20]

The actual producer was Nigel Playfair and Jeffrey was not transferred to London from Aberdeen until six months later. Gielgud, of course, was not an academic and

^b Williams (1951) reinforces the conclusion that the BBC at that time considered adaptations and dramatisations far superior to radio originals; all references to originals have been deleted from this compilation of weekly columns from the *Radio Times* (although slipshod editing has left them referenced in the chapter subheads), with the exception of dramatic features, which are evidently considered to be on a par with canonical dramatic literature.

cannot be expected to meet academic standards. His error became a problem when Briggs, beginning his marathon history of British broadcasting, wrote of the same events:

Earlier in the year, in January, Jeffrey had produced the first play actually written for broadcasting – *Danger*, by Richard Hughes: it was set in a coal mine. It was followed soon afterwards by the first of the many radio plays written by L du Garde Peach, a comedy called *Light and Shade*. [Briggs 1961: 281]

Without indicators of quotation or citation, two sentences lifted bodily from Gielgud's anecdotal 'history' become absolute fact with the gravitas of the pre-eminent academic authority on British broadcasting. Briggs, however, is the historian of broadcasting context rather than broadcasting content (and in that respect is relied upon in this study). All references to radio drama throughout his multi-volume history come from Gielgud (1957) and all but this are properly credited.

Gielgud cannot however be blamed for the errors in Rattigan (2002), who gets both the date and content of *Danger* wrong^c thereby undermining what is otherwise a considered development of Beck's essay on how the listener engages with radio drama, "Cognitive Mapping and Radio Drama" (2000b). Although Arnheim laid the foundations for a theory of listening in 1936 and Crisell applied it specifically to drama in *Understanding Radio* (1986),^d the acoustic nature of the best radio drama – what Meszaros (2005) calls "aural geographies" – can be said to have characterised the field at the end of the 20th century and the very beginning of the 21st. Internal crises at the BBC during the timeframe of this study suggest that the next field of debate is likely to be institutional.

^c "The world's first *radio*-drama, *Danger* by Richard Hughes, was written and broadcast live in 1923. It was devised more as a radiophonic experiment featuring three miners facing a crisis in a Welsh coal-mine." [Rattigan 2002: 30] There can be no doubt that *Danger* was first broadcast on January 15 1924 and the three speaking characters are middleclass sightseers trapped in a flooding mine.

^d "...what is also of interest about the comprehensive role of the listener's imagination in radio is that it abolishes the conventional distinction between actors (who perform) and the audience (who sit apart and watch) because the words, delivered by actors who are a vast distance away yet through the paradox of technology 'closer' to us than they would be in a theatre audience, invade each of us alone and in our own surroundings and force us to take over some of the functions which would be performed on-stage." [Crisell 1986: 146]

Crook's *Radio Drama: Theory and Practice* (1999a) is the most recent and – taken together with his associated online essays – most thorough study of all aspects of the field. He advances his own take on listening theory, provides a concise history of the British form and a comprehensive survey of radio drama in other countries. The only other work to discuss international radio drama, albeit across a narrower range than Crook, is Lewis (1981).

In summary, therefore, the full-length studies in the field of British radio drama consist of Gielgud (1932, 1946, 1948 and 1957), Felton (1949), Drakakis and Lewis (both 1981), Rodger (1982), Crook (1999), Beck (2000) and Rattigan (2002). A case can be made for including McWhinnie (1959) but Arnheim and Crisell discuss the medium rather than the form. There are a number of 'how-to' books, of which Ash (1985) and MacLoughlin (2001) are robust, practical guides to the process of writing and submission.⁶ The first in the field, Gordon Lea's *Radio Drama and How to Write It* (1926) is not what it seems; in reality it is a guide to writing stage drama which seems to have been overtaken during the writing by Lea's enthusiasm for the new medium. He offers no practical advice to the writer but provides the broadcast historian with a detailed analysis of what seems to have been the first BBC dramatisation, *Three Episodes from 'Under Two Flags'* (October 1925), and the conviction that radio plays would eclipse the stage.

There is a wider literature that can be pieced together from incidental sources – references in works about radio in general, about the BBC as an institution and, to a much lesser extent, to 20th century literature in general; introductions to published radio scripts; and the published reminiscences of those involved. In the latter category Gielgud again leads the field with three volumes (1947, 1950 and 1965) all of which discuss his relationship with colleagues – often antagonistic – and his firsthand observations of radio drama in America and pre-Nazi Germany. *One Year of Grace* (1950) is, however, essential to understanding the sudden reining-in of Gielgud's power at the BBC and the consequent flowering of multiple dramatic forms, across multiple channels, in the 1950s. The book describes Gielgud's response to what he saw as twin attacks on his skill and probity published during his yearlong sabbatical in 1948.

⁶McInerney (2001: 79) compounds the Gielgud problem by quoting Briggs quoting Gielgud on *Danger* but otherwise contains a helpful chapter on writing radio plays and drama documentaries.

Maurice Gorham, first controller of the Light Programme and first postwar controller of BBC Television, certainly belittled Gielgud's achievement in *Sound and Fury* (1948) but far more serious was the Labour MP Geoffrey Cooper's exposé of corruption at the BBC, *Caesar's Mistress* (1948), a book rarely if ever discussed by historians of the Corporation but which cries out for academic reappraisal. In fact the Drama Department escapes lightly – the only complaint made to Cooper was that Gielgud gave too many of the best parts to his then wife – but Gielgud's disproportionate response, it is argued in Chapter 9 of this study, led to him being discredited professionally.

After Gielgud's retirement (and, indeed, his own) D G Bridson, creator of the feature-as-drama, published his memoir *Prospero and Ariel* (1971). Bridson writes from a unique standpoint – graduate of the Manchester 'school', Deputy Head of Features, pioneer of transatlantic co-production and, in the 1940s, a peripatetic ambassador for the BBC's unique dramatic form – but his preoccupation is his subtitle, "the rise and fall of radio". In 1971, of course, BBC television led the world in social realist drama (and Bridson is also probably unique among BBC insider memorialists of his era as an out-and-out socialist); radio and particularly radio drama had become a secondary medium. Bridson had lost faith in the form he largely created when the Features dramatists moved to the Third Programme, which he considered elitist and nowhere near experimental enough.

Gielgud's successor as Head of Drama, Martin Esslin, came into post as the author of key works on Brecht and the Theatre of Absurd; indeed, he is credited with coining the latter term. His writing about radio drama is thus extremely disappointing, no more than some observations in his 1980 collection, *Meditations*.

Many BBC pioneers wrote memoirs and some comment on drama. Peter Eckersley (1941) is naturally the best source for the first dramatic experiment, his performance of the balcony scene from *Cyrano*, broadcast from Writtle in 1922; he is incidentally noteworthy for his vision of complete home entertainment and information by cable half a century before it came about. Cecil Lewis published in January 1924, thus writing before Hughes wrote the first radio play; all he offers on the potential of original drama for radio is the opinion that "it would appear that there is just as large a future for the broadcast play that is heard and not seen as there is for the cinema play that is seen and

not heard.”³; he does, however, provide (pp. 85-89) an insider’s view of the theatrical boycott of radio written whilst it was still in force. Lewis’s superior, Arthur Burrows, published a few months later and offers a pen-portrait of the otherwise mysterious Jeffrey, who had just been appointed the BBC’s first Head of Drama as Burrows went to press. What we really lack, of course, is the testimony of Jeffrey himself. Matheson (1933) comments on the radiogenic work of the Programme Research Department and Young (1933) describes his work on the landmark feature *The Western Land*. Silvey (1974) devotes much of his memoir to the Drama Reports Scheme of 1937, the foundation of internal BBC audience research, however the contemporary documents in the BBC Written Archives at Caversham are far more useful for the student of product rather than process.

Pegg (1983) examines the impact of radio on British society between the wars and includes a useful overview of the Drama Reports Scheme, however Scannell and Cardiff (1991), covering much the same period, have become the leading authority on the interplay between the aims of broadcasters and the aspirations of listeners. For the purposes of this study the exploration of regional broadcasting, principally the work of Harding and Bridson at Manchester, has been especially useful. Scannell (1996) develops the phenomenological themes of the earlier work and includes fascinating discussion of Bridson’s scripted actuality series *Harry Hopeful* and *Billy Welcome* (pp. 25-48).

Radio drama is only a chapter in Elkan and Dorotheen Allan’s *Good Listening* (1948) but is nevertheless invaluable as a unique example from its time of how the product was received by culturally aware listeners, period production technique (how the plays actually sounded) and the problems of trying to access the archive.

Although literary scholars often mention the radio plays of Beckett, Pinter, Arden and Stoppard in inclusive studies of their respective *oeuvres*, works which treat radio drama as literature in its own right are few and far between. Whitehead’s *The Third Programme: A Literary History* (1989) is precisely that and particularly valuable for the case study of Reed’s *A Hedge Backwards* (1955). It might be said that Whitehead’s study lacks context; certainly it benefits from being read in conjunction with Carpenter’s 1996 chronicle of fifty years of the Third and Radio 3, although this tends

to be uncritical. Chothia (1996) is unique in considering the contribution made by radio drama of the so-called Experimental Period, especially Guthrie and his stream of consciousness technique, to the development of modernist drama in general pre-1940.

As for the plays themselves, Peach and Berkeley were first into print in 1927, with *Broadcast Sketches* and the banned *Machines* respectively. Peach's *Radio Plays* followed in 1931. That same year Guthrie published his 'microphone plays'. Gielgud's 1932 collection includes his prototypical "play-of-debate" *Red Tabs* (1932) and the multi-viewpoint *Friday Morning* (1932), reminders that for all his faults Gielgud was a gifted dramatist in his early thirties. Sieveking (1934) includes complete texts of several of the plays and dramatic features he "played" live on what he considered to be his instrument, the revolutionary Dramatic Control Panel. Sieveking describes the DCP at length in the first part of the book and, like Gordon Lea, devotes disproportionate space to considering the now unfathomable question of whether radio plays could be printed at all. *Kaleidoscope*, he concluded, certainly could not, hence all we have of this earliest experiment in sound art is a short extract. Fisher (2002) includes what seems to be an abbreviated script or prompt sheet for Harding's 1931 production of Ezra Pound's 'melodrama' *The Testament of François Villon*; although this is a fascinating insight into the extreme avant-gardism of the Research Department it seems to have been more a ballad-opera, setting Villon's poems – in their original medieval French – to Pound's music "interspersed with brief snatches of dialogue in 'hobo' language",⁴ rather than a melodrama, a play with music, in the sense of Sackville-West's *The Rescue* (1945). Few British radio plays were published in the 1930s – Hamilton's because he was a famous writer and Wade's to tie in with the film version of *The Wedding Group*. Surprisingly, therefore, there was something of a boom in publishing radio plays during World War II, despite restrictions: *Shadow of the Swastika* (1940), *The Saviours* (1942), *The Weakness of Frau Borkhardt* (1942), *Aaron's Field* (1943), *The Man Born to be King* (1943) and the debate plays of Linklater (1941 and 1942) which were clearly published as stage versions of radio plays in that two make use of television screens. The most unusual wartime publication, however, is *Junction X* (1944), issued as a War Office pamphlet for sale at station kiosks.

After the war the publication of radio plays becomes haphazard. The radio plays of famous writers – Beckett, Pinter, Arden, Stoppard and others – have been published in various editions whilst famous radio plays may or may not have been published. Reed’s *Streets of Pompeii*, for example, won the RAI Prize in 1953 but was not published until 1971; his dramatisation of *Moby Dick* was published in 1947 yet only four parts of the unique *Hilda Tablet* sequence have ever been published (1971b). MacNeice fared similarly; *Christopher Columbus* and *The Dark Tower* were published in the year of their first production (1942 and 1946 respectively) whilst a comprehensive selection of his other radio plays was only published in 1969, after his death. Likewise Giles Cooper was effectively memorialised with a 1966 collection, albeit this contains only six plays from one of the most prolific writers of his period. *Under Milk Wood* has become a disputed text, scholars arguing what Thomas intended and did not intend to include in any final revision; this study being primarily concerned with what original listeners actually heard, the Dent edition from February 1954 (reissued in paperback 1962) has been preferred. Bridson somewhat undermined his own literary standing by issuing *The Christmas Child* (1950) as “a collection of poems for reading aloud”; in fact the volume contains complete texts of *Aaron’s Field* and *The Christmas Child*, extracts from *The March of the ’45*, *The Seven Deadly Sins* and *Steel*, and full texts of several of his wartime dramatic features. Angela Carter’s *Come unto these Yellow Sands* (1985) is a rare collection of radio plays from a writer best known for her novels and short stories and includes Carter’s preface defending her contention that radio “has always attracted and continues to attract the avant-garde.”⁵

What we lack, of course, is a literature of the ‘everyday’ radio play. From 1978 to 1990 the BBC issued collections of “The Best Radio Plays of” the various years, but these are the Giles Cooper Award winners and by no means typical. *The Young Playwrights Festival* (BBC 1988) includes first plays by Benjamin Zephaniah and Jeanette Winterson, who both became significant literary figures, but also *The Box* by Hattie Naylor, who remains primarily a radio dramatist.^f Otherwise we have Flatteau’s rather odd choice of *Saturday Night Theatre* plays (1947) and Penguin’s *New English Dramatists 12: Radio Plays* (1968), all of which premiered on the Third Programme.

^f See Appendix 8.

In considering radio drama in other countries this study shares Gielgud's opinion that, for the first quarter of a century at any rate, America and Germany were the BBC's only peers. When American commercial networks abandoned drama, however, other countries that had relied on the American product – Australia, New Zealand, and particularly Canada – developed indigenous traditions whilst Ireland, quite literally in the shadow of the BBC, suddenly became a major player in the field. Howard Fink, in Lewis (1981) and in collaboration with John Jackson (1987 and 1989) is the principal authority on Canadian radio drama, both contextually and in terms of anthologies. Frick (1987) provides insider insight, as the CBC drama script editor during the so-called 'Golden Decade'. Andrew Allan, who produced almost all the plays of the Golden Decade, left only a disappointing and somewhat curmudgeonly *Self-Portrait* (1974). The plays collected by one of Frick's successors, Dave Carley (1996), demonstrate a later flowering of the form. Very little has been written about Australian or New Zealand radio drama – a play and an article by Douglas Stewart in Sykes (1977) and Rodney Pybus's chapter in Lewis (1981) – and, seemingly, nothing at all about Irish radio drama despite the fact that the form continues to flourish on RTÉ.

Barnouw's three-volume history (1966-70) provides the narrative of the first half-century of American broadcasting. Unlike Briggs, Barnouw had a keen interest in radio drama and his 1945 collection *Radio Drama in Action* preserves texts of the war-effort ranging from Orson Welles' Columbus celebration (in stark contrast to MacNeice's take on the same anniversary) to *Japan's Advance Base: the Bonn Islands* (1944), part of NBC's *Pacific Story* series wholly written by Arnold Marquis who Barnouw tells us was relied upon by military strategists despite the fact he had never visited South East Asia.⁶ Blue (2002) supplies the political context in which those texts were written, charting the stance taken by the writers and producers of *Columbia Workshop* in advocating American intervention in Europe in the period between the Munich Crisis and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour – the same writers who would fall foul of anti-Communist witch-hunts a decade later. MacDonald (1979) focuses on the rise and fall of the soap opera, series and serials, with an insightful discussion of the development of quantitative audience research. Douglas (1999) specifically avoids radio drama⁷ but is invaluable for her chapter unpacking the qualitative research of Lazarsfeld, Stanton and the Office of Radio Research which mirrored that of Silvey in Britain. Silvey, indeed,

contributed a chapter to their *Radio Research 1942-3*. Engelman (1996) provides the political context to American public service broadcasting without considering non-actuality content in any detail.

Crook identifies the reason German radio drama is not discussed as often or as widely as it deserves to be: “Germany possesses a rich and diverse critical tradition and celebration of the radio drama form, but the language barrier means that a wealth of texts is inaccessible to the radio drama communities of the English speaking world.”⁸ The exception, as Crook points out, is Frost and Herzfeld-Sander (1991), seven key *hörspiele* translated for Pacifica’s *SoundPlay* series. Whilst the plays were written between 1945 and 1977 it should be noted that they are all what might be called “second period *hörspiele*”, that is to say in the style developed during the postwar reconstruction period which may seem radical and experimental to those accustomed to the BBC model but are nevertheless nowhere near as experimental as works of the New *Hörspiel* tradition that began in 1965. Mark Cory discusses and defines New *Hörspiele* – and what makes them different from what went before – in his 1974 book and his chapter in Kahn and Whitehead (1994). Huwiler (2005) proposes a radiophonic methodology for analysing New *Hörspiele* as sound art. For the purposes of this study, though, Martyn Bond’s 1973 comparison of postwar German radio drama and the BBC model provided the crucial but extremely prosaic reason why the former is considered more prestigious than the latter.

A rare, possibly unique example of a European public broadcaster publishing examples of its radio drama in English translation is Croatian Radio’s collection of twelve plays from the 1990s (Ivankovic and Maticic 1999). Here, evidently, is a producer of radio drama similar in scale and range to RTÉ and the plays themselves certainly warrant further study.

There is an emerging literature regarding radio drama in African and Asian nations where it often acts as a catalyst for social change or cohesion – for example Dina Ligaga (2005) on the Kenyan radio play *Not Now* (2003), which dramatised the issues

surrounding forced marriage. Important though such discourse inarguably is, it is not the subject of the present study.^g

In terms of the BBC as an institution Briggs (1961-79) is the ultimate authority albeit he perhaps relies too heavily on the minutes of governors and committees. Burns (1977) was a landmark study of the corporation's employees engaged in their daily activity. Burns wrote at a time when the BBC was just beginning to introduce business accountancy techniques to its production practices; he could not have realised that the next three decades would be dominated by the dichotomy of cost-cutting versus cultural entrepreneurship. The ultimate expression of this, of course, was the term of office of John Birt (1993-2000). Producer Choice as a management tool is discussed by McDonald (1995), Harris and Wegg-Prosser (1998a and 1998b) and Wegg-Prosser (2001); Felix (2000) is an exception, a BBC "change practitioner" at the time of implementation. Barnett and Curry (1994) describe the impact of Producer Choice in its first year. Born (2004) describes the situation from 1996 through the entire director-generalship of Greg Dyke (2000-2004) to the appointment of his successor, Mark Thompson, in June 2004. Born is not a media specialist but an anthropologist, effectively embedded in the Drama Department (with access to News) for the duration of her study. This, of course, is the Television Drama Department but for a brief period of bi-mediality radio and television drama were officially one, and Born's description of the pitch process is doubtless the same for both forms. The difficulty with Born is that her structure makes it difficult to pin down the date or even order of events. For the effect of Producer Choice on radio drama, Peter M Lewis (2004) is the single published source and particularly valuable in that it draws comparisons with Lewis's time as an observer in the Radio Drama Department 1985-87.^h

Chapter 14 of this study takes up where Born and Lewis left off and considers the output of the BBC Radio Drama Department six years on from the end of Producer Choice, three years on from the Hutton Report and the resignation of Greg Dyke but –

^g Frommlet (1992) includes two collectively-written dramas from Namibia (in English). Henderson (1973) contains the winning texts from the BBC African Service's "Write a Play for Africa" competition and Morris and Morris (1984) presents the texts of two highly political plays by African expatriates in London, broadcast by the BBC World Service in 1981.

^h It needs to be made clear that Peter M Lewis (2000 and 2004) and Peter Lewis (1978 and 1981) are different people.

significantly – in the final year of the ‘old’ financial settlement, the year before (some would say) the BBC had literally to pay the price for the Gilligan affair.

In short, the field of academic debate surrounding radio drama can be crudely characterised as Gielgud and pro-Gielgud (albeit with exceptions), post-Gielgud and anti-Gielgud. Given that the major studies have come decades apart – and focus on different aspects – there is little discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of earlier arguments. Even when attacking Gielgud it is his errors of fact that are criticised rather than, say, his blinkered view of his own form. There is a much wider scholarly literature on the BBC as an institution, although there is a tendency for this to mirror the BBC’s own preoccupations – for example, news and the commissioning process – rather than the concerns of listeners and viewers (Pegg, Scannell and Cardiff being the exceptions in this regard). Scholars who consider the literary merits of selected radio plays – a very small field indeed – do so in their published form and more often than not with (unfavourable) comparisons to the playwright’s stage work. The playwrights themselves, however, from Sieveking to Carter, all insist that they wrote their radio work mindful of the limitations and advantages of the sound-only medium, to be heard rather than read.

This study builds upon recent scholarship by revisiting and where necessary revising the received narrative of the development of British radio drama but brings the story up to date – another eight years on from Crook in terms of the form, a key three years on from Born in terms of the contextual, institutional frame – but makes a distinctive contribution to the field by mapping the emergence of the distinct art form that is radiogenic drama by means of the plays themselves.

1.3 Archive and internet

All contemporary broadcasters have an Internet presence and most broadcasters of radio drama have some sort of online ‘listen again’ facility. None currently offer downloadable versions of mainstream productions, either free or for payment, although

there has been occasional fringe activity in specially written podcast serials.ⁱ All ‘listen again’ facilities are time-limited, with BBC productions currently only available for seven days after the original broadcast.

Given the BBC’s disinclination to broadcast from its sound archive or to revive in significant numbers classic radio plays of the past,^j the only practical way of accessing previously broadcast British radio plays is through the National Sound Archive at the British Library, which acts as a portal to the BBC Archive. The problems with this system are discussed at length in Chapter 16. The microfiche archive of play scripts at the BBC Written Archives Centre is equally invaluable but again incomplete and impossible to access remotely.

Vintage American radio drama, on the other hand, could scarcely be more accessible with innumerable OTR (“Old Time Radio”) websites offering downloads, podcasts or online listening. Some are free but most charge a small fee. All, however, specialise in series and serials, the staples of everyday American listening in the 1930s and 1940s, rather than the literary product of MacLeish or Corwin. Other sites offer scripts or transcripts^k; most include a *War of the Worlds* script, many an early Corwin transcript, usually *The Plot to Overthrow Christmas*.

A rare example of a classic recording embedded within an academic webpage is the original CBC production of Reuben Ship’s *The Investigator* on the Albany University site for its *Journal of Multi Media History*.^l Paradoxically, avant-garde radio drama is better served on the Internet than the mainstream product. Indeed, many would argue that the Internet is the natural platform for acoustic art. Perhaps the best site – certainly the one most used in this study – is ubuweb,^m with a kaleidoscopic mix of archive and new work supported by authoritative texts.ⁿ

ⁱ See for example *Claybourne* (<http://claybourne.tlcpodcastnetwork.com/>), actually a revival of a New Zealand radio serial from the 1998, revived online in 96 parts 2005-2006.

^j See Chapter 14.

^k For example, the Generic Radio Workshop, <http://www.genericradio.com/>

^l <http://www.albany.edu/jmmh/vol3/investigator/mvclay.htm> - see also Chapter 15.

^m <http://www.ubuweb.com/sound/>

ⁿ See, for example, the downloadable extracts and discussion of Artaud’s *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu*, discussed in Chapter 13 (<http://www.ubuweb.com/sound/artaud.htm>).

1.4 Methodology

Inevitably, this study uses both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, with the latter predominating where product is concerned. It is of course possible to simply quantify the number of plays broadcast in a given year and compare it to the total in other years – this is indeed what is done in Chapter 14 with the output of BBC Radio 3 and Radio 4 in 2006 – but it is not possible to maintain that every play broadcast was equally good or even demonstrated basic competence. The vast majority of product in any entertainment medium is ephemeral. If the claim made here – that radio drama has been a major overlooked art form of the 20th Century – is to be justified, then the focus has to be not necessarily on plays of extraordinary brilliance but on plays of significance. *Under Milk Wood*, for example, was both inspired and successful but it did not generate a genre.

Thus the plays chosen as case studies have been selected partly on subjective grounds – their appeal as drama – but primarily because they serve as useful and significant milestones, marking out key stages in the development of the radio form.

A Comedy of Danger, being the first, selects itself. *Machines*, however, was never broadcast but is of interest not only because of its banning but also because it illustrates how quickly a fluent radiophonic technique developed, more akin to film than to the stage, a trend explored further in subsequent chapters. *The War of the Worlds* is surely the best known radio dramatisation; like *Machines* it created a scandal, but the reason for its inclusion here is the way in which its two authors use contrasting dramatisation techniques; the first half using the signatures of live newscasts to create the illusion of actuality that wrongfooted so many listeners, the second half sticking to a traditional, heavily-narrated method. *Aaron's Field* is important both historically, as the first radio play to be broadcast after the declaration of war in 1939, and dramatically, as the embodiment of the technique Bridson had developed in Manchester, drawing on traditional dramatic forms and vernacular ballads. *Junction X* is unusual as an example of Home Front propaganda and also shows the dramatic feature at a time of transition, still using genuine documentary techniques whilst at the same time foreshadowing the drama of ideas and abstraction that would develop on the postwar Third Programme.

The case study in Chapter 8 is probably the hardest choice to defend on objective grounds. Is *A Single Taper* better poetry than *The Dark Tower* or more ambitious than *Christopher Columbus* and *The Rescue*? Probably not. Was it as successful as *The Christmas Child*, which transferred to television? Indisputably not. But it is the most extraordinarily radiogenic piece of drama and demonstrates better than any of the above what can be achieved, on a shoestring budget in a regional programming slot, solely by the power of well-chosen words set in darkness. It therefore argues the case for a ‘pure’ radio drama, a play that simply could not achieve its effect on film, TV or stage.⁹

Whilst Dylan Thomas wrote the best known radio play and although Henry Reed was probably the most accomplished radio dramatist to develop entirely on the Third, *All That Fall* is the case study in Chapter 10, chosen because it was the first avant-garde play commissioned by the BBC^p and because Beckett used his commission to create a drama both radiophonic in terms of sound effects and radiogenic, the latter encapsulated in Maddy Rooney’s famous line: “Do not imagine, because I am silent, that I am not present...”⁹

Pearl is the most recent play used as a case study here. This is not to argue there have been no important radio plays since 1978 but that there have been no subsequent radio plays acknowledged to be significant cultural events *before* their first broadcast. *Pearl* also demonstrates a trend that continues to the present whereby dramatists who have gravitated from radio to other, more prestigious forms return to radio (permanently in Arden’s case) because they find it less restrictive.

Finally, Artaud’s blasphemous, scatological *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu* – another banned play – is the case study in Chapter 13. It may well be the most shocking literary work ever commissioned for broadcasting but it is included here because of its direct influence on Beckett’s later radio experiments and its indirect influence on German New *Hörspiele*.

It has not been possible to balance what are inevitably personal reactions to first encounters with scripts or recordings with the critical reactions of the time. Whilst every stage play that has opened in London since the emergence of the British Press has been

⁹ See also the discussion of Pinter’s *A Slight Ache* in Chapter 12.

^p Previous experimentalists had been BBC employees, such as Sieveking and Guthrie.

reviewed somewhere, scarcely any radio play has ever generated a single contemporary review. Even *The Listener*, the BBC's own cultural magazine, concerned itself primarily with radio adaptations of classic stage plays. The radio plays of some writers who have achieved distinction outside radio have fostered bodies of retrospective criticism and although these are used here the standpoint of this study is that, until radio develops a repertoire enabling one production of a play to be compared with another, these plays are only significant in the context of their day.

The Written Archives, however, contain two independent reports from 1942 and 1952-3 offering qualitative appraisals of radio drama over pre-determined periods. These are discussed in detail in Chapter 11. Earlier, in Chapter 6, the results of Silvey's Drama Reports Scheme (1937) are discussed, again qualitative rather than quantitative. Today, as in 1937, the BBC has no domestic competitor in the field of radio drama, thus there is no discussion here of audience figures from RAJAR, the outsourced successor to Silvey's department. Ratings are irrelevant to a single provider. If the BBC is to continue to allocate significant resources to original drama the only question that matters is that of quality.

That said, this study concludes with a quantitative overview of radio drama in 2006. This seems appropriate, given that no one could possibly listen to 677 hours of product, not counting *The Archers*, *Silver Street* or anything on BBC 7. Equally, it is surely relevant to demonstrate that, at a time when the form is perceived to be in decline, more drama is being broadcast than ever before. Given that premise, objective criteria have been used to categorise the output and identify trends, which in turn enables objective comparisons to be made with the output of other broadcasters in other countries who still demonstrably regard drama as a prestige product.

1.5 Terminology

The core terminology used in this study is taken from the Radio Drama Script Commissioning Agreement (RDA) concluded by the BBC, the Writers' Guild of Great Britain, the Society of Authors and the Personal Managers' Association in 2006. Thus a single play is defined as:

a fictional dramatic work specially written for radio (and not based on any third party proprietary source material of any kind) and intended for transmission as a single work or as an episode of an anthology series where the continuing link consists only of the generic title or generic theme.¹⁰

Dramatisation involves converting into radio-dramatic form a work of fiction that was not originally created in dramatic form, such as a novel or short story. Adaptation is the process of converting something that already exists in dramatic form, such as a stage play, film or television script into a radio script. Only where substantial reworking is required – for example, the creation of new characters or writing new scenes – would the writer responsible be credited.⁹ Both dramatisation and adaptation could result in a single play, series or serial. Even practitioners switch randomly between the terms, however every effort has been made in this study to ensure precision, for example changing the BBC's designations where appropriate in Chapter 14 and Appendix 8.

The RDA unhelpfully describes series and serials in a single paragraph. For the purposes of rights and remuneration there is no practicable difference; here, however, a series means “a group of episodes ... containing the same situations and characters with a resolution at the end of each episode”¹¹, whereas a serial is likewise a group of episodes containing the same general situations and principal characters but with “a continuous story carried on from one episode to the next.”¹² A soap opera, which the RDA does not define, is a serial which is never resolved.

The precise definition of a feature is almost impossible. The RDA describes the “Dramatised Feature” as “a radio programme whose Script contains a fictional treatment in dramatic form of a factual subject,” but then insists: “The Script will also contain non-dramatic elements.”¹³ We can recognise this product – a documentary with scenes of re-creation interspersed with unscripted discussion or commentary. But where are the non-dramatic elements of *The March of the '45* or *Junction X*? The *dramatic* feature is therefore clearly different to a *dramatised* feature.

Gielgud, who was Head of Drama *and* Features until 1945, attempted the following definition:

⁹ For example, Peter Straughan's prize-winning adaptation of the film script for *M* (see Chapter 17).

A Feature Programme, therefore, may be described as any programme-item, not basically in dramatic form, designed to make use of radio-dramatic technique in its presentation to the listener. More tersely, it might be said that while a Feature Programme is not a radio play, it needs the services both of actors and a radio drama producer.
[Gielgud 1957: 48]

Gielgud, clearly, is describing the dramatised feature but, unlike the RDA, could also be describing the drama-documentary, entirely dramatic but basing its claims to distinction on the accuracy of its depiction of fact. Again, this does not apply to *The March of the '45* and *Junction X*. Prince Charles Edward Stuart plainly did not encounter electricity pylons when he marched his troops into Lancashire in 1745.

Laurence Gilliam, the only Head of an independent Features Department at the BBC (1945-63) is less helpful still. His *BBC Features* (1950) is a collection of prose versions of factual programmes and as such gives no impression of how this unique radio form sounded in its heyday.

In broadcasting the term has come to signify a wide range of programme items, usually factual and documentary, presented by a variety of techniques, but mostly making use of edited actuality. The essential quality of the feature programme is that it should be the expression of one mind, whatever technique it uses.
[Gilliam 1950: 9]

For the purposes of this study the dramatic feature is a non-theatrical play in the vernacular style developed in Manchester by Harding and Bridson but deriving, through Harding, from the work of the Programme Research Department created to accommodate Jeffrey, Sieveking and other experimenters when Gielgud took over the Drama Department in 1929. The dramatic feature differs from a feature programme or dramatised feature in that it is entirely dramatic. It differs from a drama-documentary in that it does not claim to be factual.

Finally, two terms used throughout this study: “radiogenic” means a technique or style particularly suited to radio, whilst “radiophonic” refers to the dramatic impact of sound in radio, Beckett’s *bruitage*.¹

¹ See Chapter 10.

1.6 Argument

Drama was a constituent element of radio broadcasting from the outset with extracts from the contemporary stage repertoire giving way, in the British model, to abridged classics, principally Shakespeare. Length was an early concern – how long would a listener be prepared to listen to a play without being able to see the action? A second consideration was even more fundamental: was it even possible to conceive of a meaningful ‘blind’ drama? Richard Hughes’s *A Comedy of Danger* (1924) demonstrated that radio drama was not only possible but also desirable, albeit within a very limited paradigm of “Danger in the Darkness”, immediately seized upon by other European broadcasters. There followed a period of experiment that, in less than five years, took radio drama from physical darkness to the non-physical, to the internal monologue, a context in which sight was not only unnecessary but a distraction. Such experiments were only possible because the BBC had developed a multi-studio system linked through the Dramatic Control Panel.⁵

For the BBC, the experimental period came to an abrupt end with the appointment of Val Gielgud as Head of Drama in January 1929. Gielgud came with a theatrical background and a concept of radio drama cast in theatrical terms, a kind of populist provincial repertory of the air. Whilst this was undoubtedly successful – to all intents and purposes it describes the single-play output of Radio 4 today – it made no claims to be art or even important. For Gielgud, prestige lay in adaptations and dramatisations; his first success as Head of Drama was Shaw’s *Saint Joan* in April 1929 and equally formative for him was the groundbreaking dramatisation of Compton Mackenzie’s *Carnival* by his friend Eric Maschwitz (Holt Marvell) in January of that year.¹

Gielgud was a complex character. On the one hand he was a passionate advocate of original radio plays; he wrote them himself and he wrote a series of practical guides intended to help others do so. On the other hand he always considered the average stage play superior to any radio play. Whilst he could certainly recognise the radiogenic, he could not conceive of the radiophonic. Thus the quest for a pure radio play – an original

⁵ See Chapter 3.

¹ See Chapter 4.

radio form – went on outside Gielgud’s metropolitan bailiwick, in Manchester with Harding and Bridson. Gielgud, in fairness, recognised the quality of Bridson’s work and some examples were broadcast on the National Programme, but it was in America that the dramatic feature had its greatest influence, inspiring those involved with *The Columbia Workshop* on CBS. By 1938 the single radio play on an American commercial network was artistically more advanced than its counterpart on the publicly-funded BBC. Thus when the BBC launched an *Experimental Hour* of its own, it did so with an English version of a CBS original.^u

The declaration of war in September 1939 drove drama production out of London. The multi-studio system ended but, paradoxically, British radio drama rediscovered its ambition. Gilliam’s section mounted the six-part *Shadow of the Swastika* whilst Gielgud oversaw the seven-part series *The Saviours* and Dorothy L Sayers’ radical re-imagining of the life of Christ in twelve parts, *The Man Born to be King*. In 1942 the American radio dramatist Norman Corwin, whose dramatic feature *We Hold These Truths* had attracted an audience of 63 million, came to London to write the CBS/BBC co-production *An American in England*. This was a series of features that blurred the distinction between drama and documentary and was a clear influence on the work of Cecil McGivern, notably in *Junction X*.

By the end of the war the Features Department housed all established and emerging writers of imaginative radio drama. Now independent of Gielgud’s department and inspired by the adaptations of European stage plays being broadcast on the new Third Programme, one group of Features dramatists abandoned Bridson’s vernacular model in favour of high literary drama, the British equivalent of German postwar *Hörspiel*.^v When the Third came to create drama of its own, after 1950, it was this group from Features, notably Henry Reed, who wrote it. This, however, only happened because Gielgud had lost his authority in the wake of the *Party Manners* controversy.^w

Prior to 1950 the BBC’s official policy had to been to invite radio plays from writers known to the producers, a benign nepotism based on the belief that the craft of writing

^u *The Fall of the City*. See Chapter 5.

^v Another group, centred on Ewan McColl, developed a purer form of the vernacular ballad, the *Radio Ballads*.

^w See Chapter 9.

sound-only drama was a specialised skill. An investigation into the play-reading process in 1953 revealed the shortcomings of this system and led to the creation of a dedicated script unit. This was the turning point for British radio drama and, as it turned out, for British drama in general. From being a sideline for the selected few, writing radio plays instantly became the entry level for all dramatists. Arden was one such, Pinter another, and it was because the most celebrated stage dramatists of the day had been nurtured on radio that the radio form not only survived the democratisation of television after 1955 but continued to flourish.

The fact of the matter is that there is more original drama on BBC radio today than there has ever been before. For all his shortcomings Val Gielgud is largely responsible for the survival of the form in Britain when other public service broadcasters around the world have either ceased to produce plays altogether or maintain an output so small as to be culturally insignificant.

In 2006 only German radio can be said to rival the BBC in terms of drama output. RTÉ in Ireland produces fewer plays but is equally committed to the form. What both ARD and RTÉ routinely do, which the BBC does not, is make use of archive and repertoire, a practice highlighted by the way the respective broadcasters marked the centenary of Beckett's birth in 2006. Given concerns about maintaining BBC radio drama output at the current level in the wake of a smaller than anticipated licence fee settlement, it is argued here that reviving classic radio plays from time to time or occasionally broadcasting a recording from the archive is both cheaper and more likely to maintain an audience than the current practice of increasing the number of adaptations.

Adaptations have their place, as do dramatisations, but the underlying argument of this study is that the original single radio play is a distinct form, the best examples of which bear comparison with any literature of their time yet have never been afforded the cultural consideration that is their due.

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- ² Gielgud 1932: 11
- ³ Lewis 1924: 120
- ⁴ *Radio Times* October 27 1931
- ⁵ Carter 1985: 8
- ⁶ Barnouw 1945: 370
- ⁷ Douglas 1999: 10
- ⁸ Tim Crook, *International Radio Drama – Social, Economic and Literary Contexts*:
http://www.irudp.co.uk/radio_drama.htm.
- ⁹ Beckett 1957: 23
- ¹⁰ Radio Drama Agreement (November 9 2005 draft), Definitions, p. 4 (V)
- ¹¹ Radio Drama Agreement (November 9 2005 draft), Definitions, p. 5 (FF)
- ¹² Radio Drama Agreement (November 9 2005 draft), Definitions, p. 5 (FF)
- ¹³ Radio Drama Agreement (November 9 2005 draft), Definitions, p. 3 (J)

Chapter 2: Danger in the darkness

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the origins of broadcast radio drama, from adapted stage plays in Britain and America in 1922-3 to indisputably the first adult play conceived purely for the radio, Richard Hughes's *A Comedy of Danger*, broadcast by the BBC in January 1924.

Hughes's ingenious solution to the perceived problem of drama in a "blind" medium became the form's first paradigm. Within months indigenous "danger in the darkness" radio plays were broadcast in Germany and France. Accepting the limitations of darkness was not, however, the only solution. In October 1924 Hans Flesch, station director of Radio Frankfurt, celebrated the insubstantiality of the medium with his caprice *Zauberie auf dem Sender*, discussion of which concludes the chapter.

2.2 "The Wolf" and "Cyrano" (1922)

On Christmas Eve 1906 Thomas Edison's Canadian protégé Reginald Fessenden broadcast the first radio programme from Brant Rock, Massachusetts, to ships of the United Fruit Company in and around Boston harbour.¹ The broadcast consisted of speech and music, both recorded and live. Fessenden's purpose was to prove that the human voice could be transmitted over the airwaves, something his great rival Marconi had not been able to do. Any entertainment value was entirely incidental, yet Fessenden can be said to link the two bodies on opposite sides of the Atlantic that claim to have first brought drama to radio. From 1883 to 1890 Fessenden worked for Edison at the main company plant at Schenectady, New York, and in 1916 he sold his patents to the Marconi Company. In the autumn of 1922 General Electric's station WGY in Schenectady and Marconi's station 2MT at Writtle in Essex both broadcast extracts from stage plays.

Crook² and Fink³ agree that WGY beat 2MT by at least a month. Elizabeth McLeod recounts that in the summer of 1922 local actor Edward H Smith of the Masque theatre group approached Kolin Hager, Programme Director of WGY, and offered to adapt popular plays for radio.⁴ The obvious choice was the Masque's most recent production, Eugene Walter's *The Wolf*, a melodrama of the Canadian woods first seen on Broadway in 1908.⁵ The stage play ran for two-and-a-half hours whereas Hager, presuming that a lack of visual stimuli reduced the listener's attention span, was only prepared to air forty minutes. Smith therefore hacked down Walter's three-act original to what was essentially Act Two with explanatory interpolations from Acts One and Three. This aired in September 1922, with Smith and his troupe revisiting their stage roles, and was a considerable success.^a Historically, *The Wolf* was the first acknowledgement that a play on radio is essentially different from a play on stage.

In Britain the radio drama 'first' came on Tuesday October 17 1922 when Peter Eckersley and friends broadcast the balcony scene from *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1898) from an old Royal Flying Corps hut at Writtle in Essex, part of the Marconi Company's main UK site at Chelmsford.

On graduating from the Manchester Municipal College of Technology,⁶ Eckersley had joined the Royal Flying Corps and helped develop air-to-ground communications. By the war's end he was leading Marconi's research team at Writtle and in February 1922 he began broadcasting weekly half-hours from station 2MT.

Eckersley's broadcast style was more madcap than boffin.^b He recalled in his memoirs, "We failed to take ourselves seriously, and broadcasting, as we saw it, was nothing more nor less than an entertainment, for us as much as the listeners."⁷ No recording exists in the British Library Sound Archive but it is reasonable to assume that 2MT's rendition of Rostand's play was not entirely reverent. After all, Eckersley was not broadcasting to a large general audience but to a smallish clique of young male technophiles like himself.^c

^a Blue 2002: 1 reports that WGY received 2000 letters in response to *The Wolf* from within a 50 mile radius of the station.

^b An example can be heard on the BBC's heritage pages: www.bbc.co.uk/4inplay/19221017.shtml.

^c Lewis 1924: 9 describes "a small band of between 600 and 800 persons, all keen enthusiasts in wireless work" operating in Britain 1920-22.

His reasons for choosing the balcony scene were wholly practical: “it is played, on the stage, in semi-darkness with virtually stationary players and so it seemed very suitable for broadcasting.”⁸ Again, it was taken as read that radio drama must be something less than stage drama. That said *Cyrano* incidentally brought something new to the practice of drama. Sound effects had been around almost as long as theatres but had largely been intended to startle or amaze (the Thunder Sheet, for example). What Eckersley and his colleagues needed was a means of reminding listeners that Cyrano is hiding in the bushes whilst feeding Christian the language of love to relay to Roxane. It is the dramatic point of the scene, the tragedy and the comedy of Cyrano’s predicament. The set-up on stage speaks for itself. For their radio version, the Writtle team devised the first small-scale sound effect. As Eckersley’s colleague R T B Wynn recalled for *London Calling* in 1946, “my part was to produce rustling leaves.”⁹

2.3 The birth of the BBC 1922-1924

In America demand dictated supply. Because *The Wolf* was a success, Hager and Smith began condensing other staples of the provincial repertoire for broadcasting. On April 3 1923 WLW Cincinnati broadcast *When Love Awakens* by Programme Director Fred Smith, which “may have been the first play written for radio.”¹⁰ The fact of the broadcast is not in question; the “may” relates, in the absence of either recording or script, to how much of a play it was and the degree of originality.

Britain in May 1922 effectively had one broadcaster of programmes, the Marconi Company, with two transmitters, Eckersley’s 2MT at Writtle and Arthur Burrows’ 2LO at Marconi’s London headquarters in the Strand, transmitting between them for a total of ninety minutes a week. There was a demand for more – people knew what was happening across the Atlantic – and 1922 was an election year. Thus Postmaster General Frederick Kellaway pledged to provide a broadcasting solution “for the benefit of the general public but not for the benefit of individuals.”¹¹ What he got was a joint stock company formed by the six leading British manufacturers of radio equipment,^d

^d Marconi, Western Electric, Metropolitan-Vickers, British Thompson-Houston, General Electric and the Radio Communication Company.

which undertook to provide a national broadcasting service in return for a monopoly on the provision of wireless receivers. The British Broadcasting Company was capitalised by the partners at £100,000 and would derive revenue funding from a small royalty on each set sold and half of an annual 10/- licence fee to be collected by the Post Office from every household with an official BBC set. A quarter of a million licences were distributed to post offices; these alone would more than meet the capital costs of the six provincial stations planned to augment 2LO in London¹².

As public broadcasting in America began with Westinghouse KDKA's coverage of the Harding-Coolidge presidential election on November 2 1920,¹³ so the BBC came to the air on Tuesday November 14 1922 to report the crushing General Election defeat of the Lloyd George government that had overseen its birth.

News, albeit summarised and outsourced,¹⁴ was thus a staple of British broadcasting from the outset. Children's programming began on Day Two with *The Kiddies' Corner* from Manchester.¹⁵ A children's play, *The Truth about Father Christmas* by "Auntie Phyllis" (Phyllis M Twigg), was broadcast from Newcastle on Christmas Eve and thus became the first original drama specifically written for British radio.¹⁶

Music dominated the airwaves^c and on January 8 1923 Grand Opera was broadcast live from Covent Garden.¹⁷ Yet still there was no grown-up drama on the BBC, not even cut-down versions of popular stage plays. The question of royalties was clearly an issue^f but this was also the case in America where radio adaptations proliferated. In America, theatrical impresarios had been keen to use radio to promote their productions; in Britain the theatrical world was much smaller, a closed shop easier to maintain.^g

Clauses were inserted in artists' contracts by which they were barred from broadcasting while the contracts were in force; even artists who were not under contract were intimidated by threats not to sign them on again if they broadcast for the BBC.
[Briggs 1961: 251]

^c Burrows' assistant, Cecil Lewis, writing at the end of 1923, reported, "The present number of concerts given by the BBC totals out to over 17,500 hours of transmission yearly" (Lewis 1924: 51). Later (p. 71), he cites a cost for concerts of "about £104,000" in that first year of operation.

^f Twigg, as a Company employee, would have been paid little or nothing for *The Truth about Father Christmas*.

^g See also Lewis 1924: 85-89.

Equally, the BBC's General Manager J C W Reith (appointed on December 14 1922) took a Presbyterian view of popular entertainment. For Reith, to squander the educative and uplifting potential of radio on entertainment alone would be "a prostitution of its powers and an insult to the character and intelligence of the people."¹⁸

There was an obvious compromise available in instructive and improving radio versions of Shakespeare. The first BBC Shakespeare was therefore the quarrel scene from *Julius Caesar*,^h broadcast from Marconi House as part of a cultural evening on February 16 1923, albeit Val Gielgud, Director of Drama from 1929 to 1963, disputes the date:

As with so many historic occasions, there is some conflict of opinion as to when the first radio-dramatic transmission in Great Britain actually took place. The archives of the BBC give the date as February 16, 1923. On the other hand, Howard Rose, who should know, as he was a member of the cast, has told me of a broadcast on September 2, 1922. [Gielgud 1957:17]

Beck has conclusively shown that what Rose, thirty-five years after the event, thought was a broadcast was in fact a private demonstration for the benefit of invited dignitaries which took place between the formation of the BBC on May 25 1922 and the company's first broadcast from 2LO on November 14.¹⁹ From this conclusion Beck goes on to impute an intention to mislead to both Gielgud and his source – a plan to diminish the achievements of those who did not stay the course at the BBC, notably Peter Eckersley and Gielgud's predecessor R E Jeffrey. Whilst the character, tastes and prejudices of Val Gielgud have unquestionably distorted the narrative of British radio drama for at least half a century, a problem compounded by Briggs's uncritical reliance on Gielgud's *British Radio Drama* in those parts of his monumental *History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* that touch upon radio drama, this study proceeds on the basis that Gielgud's 'history' is a flawed but largely genuine attempt at a professional memoir. Gielgud is wrong about the date of the *Caesar* extract because he was not interested in events before his arrival at the *Radio Times* in May 1928. He relied on Rose, an elderly man who had been overlooked.ⁱ

^h Act IV sc 3.

ⁱ See Chapter 11.

On May 1 2LO moved to Savoy Hill and Gielgud moves onto much firmer ground. “During the opening period [Cecil] Lewis handled much of the Drama output himself ... with considerable help from Miss Cathleen Nesbitt, who played Viola to the Malvolio of Herbert Waring when *Twelfth Night* – the first play to be broadcast at comparatively full length – was produced on May 28, 1923.”²⁰

Even Shakespeare was not immune to pruning. Nesbitt’s task was to trim down five acts to two hours, a feat she also performed for *The Merchant of Venice* in June, and both *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in July. Nesbitt was a fine, intelligent actress who had been playing the classics since before World War I and who was still appearing on Broadway in 1981 aged 92. She demonstrated an attraction of radio for many future performers when she played fourteen year-old Juliet at the age of thirty-five.

Meanwhile BBC provincial stations were airing locally produced extracts and adaptations. Cardiff broadcast Act IV of Oscar Wilde’s *A Woman of No Importance* on May 22, Manchester offered *Gentlemen, The King!* by Campbell Todd on August 4, Glasgow an adaptation of Walter Scott’s *Rob Roy* on September 28 and Bournemouth *The Brass Door Knob* by Matthew Boulton on October 24. *Rob Roy* appears to be the first broadcast dramatisation but it is unclear if it was dramatised specifically for radio or simply taken from an existing stage version. Interestingly, the cast had, according to the first edition of the *Radio Times*, “been chosen specially to suit the requirements of broadcasting.”²¹ This should not be read as evidence that the theatrical boycott of the BBC grew less effective the further one got from the West End. The actors in all probability were local amateurs.^j

On November 29 2LO finally staged a modern play. *Five Birds in a Cage* (1915) by Gertrude E Jennings is a one-act comedy in which a duchess and a lord get trapped in a London tube lift with a workman, a milliner’s assistant and the liftman. Beck describes the production in detail. *Five Birds in a Cage* led to another first, the first critique of a radio play by Archibald Haddon, broadcast from 2LO on December 5 1923. From this Beck establishes that producer Milton Rosmer, who also read out the *mise en scène*, was able to achieve the spatial effects so necessary in the piece: “Thirty-five miles from

^j See Chapter 6.

London, I heard the workman's voice receding and fading as he made the descent, and I could hear the women in the lift above him giving tiny little exclamations of apprehension lest he should slip and fall."²² The characters were perfect for radio – male and female toffs, male and female workers and a comic Cockney character, all instantly distinguishable – but what makes the play itself perfect for the medium is the opening line: "Oh, the lights have gone out!"

Richard Hughes used the same device and more or less the same words to open *The Comedy of Danger*, inarguably the first adult play specifically written for the BBC, broadcast from 2LO on January 15 1924. A young woman, Mary, asks, "Hello! What's happened?" And Jack, standing a short distance away, answers, "The lights have gone out!"²³ Beck identifies the evident link with *Five Birds in a Cage* and then argues that the "structure, setting, theme and production" of Jennings' play "were the template" for Hughes's play nine weeks later.²⁴

Clearly the setting is similar – a small number of people trapped in a confined space, awaiting rescue – however, rescue from a broken down lift is purely a matter of time whereas rescue from a flooding coalmine is a question of fate. *Five Birds* is a comedy of class whereas *Danger* is a suspense drama, a comedy only in the Shakespearean sense that our principals don't die (although the third character, Bax, is not so fortunate). Hughes anticipates Hitchcockian suspense (*Lifeboat* has a similar set-up) in the way the characters' plight progressively worsens and the tension steadily rises. As with Hitchcock, the audience is intellectually convinced that their heroes cannot survive yet knows instinctively that they will and derives enjoyment from the dichotomy. The analogy really ends there. Hitchcock developed the art of linking his *dénouement* with a final twist whereas the best Hughes can contrive is Bax's unconvincing self-sacrifice. Moments earlier Bax had been determined to survive at all costs, but then, with the rescue rope dangling in front of him, he tells Jack: "No, my boy, after you; you're more value in the world than I am."²⁵

In fairness, Hughes was only twenty-three and later claimed to have written Britain's first radio play overnight. That is almost certainly not true; Hughes gave his account in the 1950s when he was in the middle of a twenty-three year creative hiatus between the novels *In Hazard* (1938) and *The Fox in the Attic* (1961). As a young man Hughes was

more productive but a one-act play or so a year was scarcely prolific and by 1956, when he gave a broadcast talk to preface one of *Danger*'s regular revivals, it was in his interests to remind the literary world that he could actually deliver written product.

According to Hughes, his producer had given him his first line.²⁶ This may again be anecdotal but it seems a more robust link to *Five Birds* than that proposed by Beck. Gielgud maintains that Hughes's producer was R E Jeffrey²⁷ and Briggs relies solely on Gielgud in his passing references to early radio drama.²⁸ In fact, as Hughes himself told the nation and as *The Times* announced before the original broadcast in 1924²⁹ *A Comedy of Danger* was produced by Nigel Playfair.

Playfair was the manager of the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, where his 1920 revival of *The Beggar's Opera* ran for an astonishing 1462 performances.³⁰ Success rendered him effectively immune from the theatrical boycott of radio. An active proponent of drama on radio from the earliest days, Playfair was behind the 1923 Shakespeares and acted in many of them himself. He certainly knew Rosmer, producer of *Five Birds*; both were London actor-producers and had worked together as long ago as 1916 when they appeared in Fred Paul's silent film version of *Lady Windermere's Fan*.³¹ Playfair doubtless heard Rosmer's production of *Five Birds* whereas Hughes was busy in late 1923 bringing his company, the Portmadoc Players to London. If, therefore, Playfair "borrowed" the opening of *Five Birds* and passed it on to Hughes, it was not plagiarism but continuation: Rosmer had achieved the most effective BBC radio drama to date and shown Playfair how to go further into the realm of "blind drama".^k

2.4 Case study: "A Comedy of Danger" (1924)

The most striking thing about the text of *Danger* is its brevity, just eighteen pages in the 1966 US edition and at most twenty-five minutes in performance. The natural

^k In 1922 Waldemar Kaempffert had speculated in *The Times*, "The motion picture gave us the silent drama. Will radio give us the blind drama – the drama that appeals only to the ear?" ("Radio, The Latest Popular Hobby, Girdling the World", July 4 1922 p. x)

assumption is that something groundbreaking should be substantial, but on the night of its first broadcast *Danger* was merely the third part of Playfair's quadruple bill.¹

Hitherto, plays on radio had always included narration. Rosmer, in *Five Birds*, had read out the stage directions, including details of costume."³² Playfair and Hughes realised that if original radio drama was to succeed, it had to do so on its own terms. Voices and sounds were the only tools the radio playwright had to work with. Thus *A Comedy of Danger* opens with a simple statement that it is set in a coal mine, then Mary's startled, anxious question.

That question is the same question the audience is asking itself and makes an instant engagement with the listener. It is the same line that opened *Five Birds* but works differently. Jennings quickly diffuses the suspense – a lift has broken down, a nuisance but scarcely life-threatening – whereas Hughes cranks up the tension by revealing the location and then adds a mystery: these people are not miners; what are they doing down a coal mine? Jennings has a device or conceit; Hughes has a hook.

There is some exposition – we find out that Jack, Mary and Bax are on a tour of the mine – but we never find out what any of the characters do for a living or what, if anything, they have in common. The characterisation, it has to be said, is weak. In the space of twenty minutes all three go from irritation to stoicism, resignation to desperation. After insisting he should be saved at all costs, Bax sacrifices himself without any indication why. In truth, *Danger* is not a good play. What should have been its strength – unbroken, real time suspense – is in fact its shortcoming. Time is compressed to a ludicrous extent, with a "distant explosion" at the bottom of page 5, the first "hiss" of water on page 6 and our hero and heroine saved from drowning twelve or so minutes later – by a rescue party that has dug its way through, potentially, "nearly a thousand feet" of rock!³³

Hughes' great leap forward in terms of radio drama was, however, the use of sound effects to advance the story. This in turn stretched the ingenuity of producer Playfair. Hughes described the problem in 1956:

¹ The evening began with *The Blacksmith's Serenade* by the American poet Vachel Lindsay (1879-1931) and ended with *The Annual Dinner* by the English humorist A P Herbert (1890-1971). Immediately before *Danger*, Playfair was himself acting in the "proposal scene" from *Pride and Prejudice*.

I had spread myself on sound effects without considering how they were to be done. Someone ran round the corner and enlisted the effects man from a cinema in the Strand – wind machine and all. But still we could make nothing sound as it was meant to sound; even in the studio, and leaving out of account the primitive transmission of those days which reduced all sounds to a single indistinguishable ‘wump’ which might be the buzzing of a gnat, the clash of swords, the roaring of Niagara or the shutting of a door.³⁴

Hughes claimed that the cast simulated an underground acoustic by putting their heads in buckets. Clearly this did not happen and is an example of Hughes’ sometimes condescending wit. In reality the *Daily Mail* reporter witnessed “a young woman in evening dress and two men holding sheets of paper in their hands declaim[ing] to a microphone their horror at being imprisoned in the mine.”³⁵

The key effects come in quick succession in the final third of the play. We hear the distant explosion, building in volume as if approaching, then a second explosion, much closer, followed by the sound of water gushing into the space where the characters (and we, the listeners) have found refuge. Above the sound of water we hear miners, elsewhere in the mine, singing ‘*Ar hyd y Nos*’; soon after that, the tap-tapping of pickaxes on stone and finally the breakthrough, lumps of rock falling into the water. Even today, this web of sound would challenge technicians. In 1924, without recorded effects and performing live, the difficulties were immense. The microphones were so crude that the actors had to literally step back or come in close to create a sense of spatial relationship. The miners ‘off’ were standing outside the studio and faded in and out by someone opening and closing the door. As for the explosion, we have only Hughes’ account from 1956.

The engineers had helped all they could, but this was the last straw. Even popping a paper bag would blow every fuse in Savoy Hill. But Playfair was something of a genius, and utterly unscrupulous. Reporters and critics were going to listen in a room specially provided for them, with its own loudspeaker. It would never do for them to hear no more than the diminutive ‘phut’ like the roaring of a sucking-dove, even if that was all the public would get. So Playfair staged a magnificent ‘explosion’ in the room next door to the press-room. Our ‘explosion’ got top marks with the press. They never discovered they had heard it through the wall.³⁶

Hughes is almost certainly playing with us here. Equally unreliable are claims that the audience listened in the dark or semi-darkness. Beck quotes the *Daily Mail* account of January 16 1924: "Listeners-in were advised that as the action of the play took place in the dark, they should hear it in the dark and many adopted the advice and lowered the lights."³⁷ It is an intriguing idea but the lack of any firsthand accounts hints that 'many' could just as easily be 'some'.

Nevertheless Hughes had written and Playfair produced the first "listening play", that is to say a play specifically written for radio in which sound drove the drama. Whilst *Danger* still suffered from the assumption that radio drama was a form in which something was lacking, it was nevertheless a play that could not successfully be done in any other medium. Playfair's creative input cemented the role of the producer in radio drama but it should be remembered that what was new about his production of *Danger* was that he employed a writer. Until Playfair commissioned Hughes, there seemed to have been a consensus that radio was not a platform for original work of any kind.

A Comedy of Danger is psychologically unconvincing and intrinsically stagy in that so much important action happens 'offstage'. But on the night of January 15 1924 it premiered to the largest single audience ever. By November 1923 the BBC was claiming a million listeners³⁸ and surely it would be safe to assume that half were listening on a Tuesday evening in January. Thus, whilst *Danger* didn't change the world, it changed the world of drama, introducing a huge new audience that had never ventured anywhere near a theatre. Hitherto, 'legitimate' theatre had been largely the province of a metropolitan elite, experimental or avant-garde theatre entirely so. Popular theatre, like popular novels, catered to the genteel, the literate, the reasonably affluent. Cinema had to an extent widened the dramatic franchise; but movies, of course, were silent in 1924. Now, suddenly, the Scottish crofter and the lighthouse keeper in the Scilly Isles could hear if not see Shakespeare and Shaw and vicariously experience the terror of being trapped in a blacked-out coalmine.

2.5 The beginnings of radio drama in France and Germany

A Comedy of Danger set the tone for early radio drama throughout Europe and the English-speaking world, often being itself the first radio play to be broadcast, especially in what was then the British Empire. Whilst the commercial imperative would see America develop a different model of radio drama, France and Germany both produced their own equivalent of *Danger* in 1924.

In France, as in Britain, the first play directly written for radio was a Christmas play, *Paris-Bethléem, Noël radieux* by Georges Angelloz, which went out on the commercial station Radiola on December 24 1922,³⁹ the same day that the BBC in Newcastle transmitted *The Truth About Father Christmas*. Then, as in America, there were broadcasts that may or may not have been true plays – Maurice Privat’s *La Conversation de Circé* (April 14 1924) and *Le Concert interrompu* by Benjamin Crémieux (July 10 1924)⁴⁰, both of which seem to have been as much music as drama – but the play which ‘began’ French radio drama in a meaningful sense was not broadcast in France until 1937.

The newspaper *L’Impartial français* held a competition for original radio plays to be judged by the great and the good of French arts. There were two winners, Paul Camille with *Agonie* and Garbriel Germinet and Pierre Cusy with *Maremoto*. *Agonie* was classical, literary and thoroughly undramatic, the confession of a dying man; *Maremoto*, on the other hand, was a play (like *Danger*) driven by sound, the story of a ship lost in a storm. Indeed, the sound effects were so realistic that when the rehearsal was accidentally broadcast, many listeners thought the distress signals were real. This led to the cancellation of the broadcast scheduled for October 23 1924. Instead, the production was relayed over a loudspeaker to a group of invited journalists,⁴¹ and the play’s true premiere was on the BBC in February 1925, translated and produced by Cecil Lewis. Even so, *Maremoto* was recognised from the outset as being the play that brought a new dramatic form to French radio.

German radio drama began the day after *Maremoto* should have aired. On October 24 1924 Radio Frankfurt broadcast *Zauberie auf dem Sender* (“*Radio Magic*” or

“*Wizardry on the Wireless*”) an “attempt at a radio grotesque” by the station director Dr Hans Flesch. Flesch was twenty-seven, a medical doctor and businessman rather than a writer. He was, however, highly cultured, a patron of the Weimar Republic’s avant-garde. Hughes, Germinet and Cusy wrote for a general, unsophisticated audience whereas Flesch catered to a cultured elite. Hughes, Germinet and Cusy produced realistic dramas of man in extremis; Flesch offered a caprice in which the new medium itself was the focus.

The audience is not hooked but inveigled into the play. They are not expecting a play at all. Instead, the real station announcer has told them that the next item is a performance of *The Blue Danube*. They can hear the orchestra tuning up – but then the broadcast is interrupted. In Germany as in Britain, reading stories to children was an obvious way to occupy the late afternoon and early evening; many listeners would no doubt recognise the voice of the “Auntie” (*märchentante*) who read stories to their children. Now she wants to tell a story in the evening, this evening – even though it is 9.30 and the audience for fairy stories has long since gone to bed. She is desperate to tell her story – the announcer can’t talk her out of it. The station director, Dr Flesch himself, gets drawn into the argument.^m The sound elements of radio are suddenly in conflict, a cacophony of sirens, drums, snatches of other broadcasts from other countries. The listener cannot tell if the racket is intentional or if there is a problem with his radio set. Flesch sends for his assistant but the assistant has heard nothing out of the ordinary. Only Flesch and the audience can hear the crazed soundtrack. Flesch realises that the wizard has somehow escaped from Auntie’s fairy tale. The wizard taunts Flesch, then addresses the audience directly. He wants them to look into their radio sets, where the tubes are glowing. On the count of three, he says he’ll appear there. He drags out the count. The music slows, becomes atonal. Flesch yells “Stop it!” and, rather disappointingly, the wizard does. Even avant-garde radio plays could not exceed half an hour in 1924.⁴²

^m The German script of *Zauberei auf dem Sender* can be found on Deiter Daniels’ *Kunst al Sendung* site, <http://www.kunst-al-sendung.de/daniels/kunst-al-sendung/content/1924/>. An mp3 of the 1962 Hessian production can be downloaded from <http://www.kultur-camp.de/medien/Zauber-auf-dem-Sender-1962-mp3-download-1119.html>.

Flesch produced a new kind of play for the new medium. *Zauberei* is utterly different from anything being attempted elsewhere. It pioneers by forty years the self-referential style of German New *Hörspiel* but had no great effect on the *hörspiel* of its own time. 1925 saw a German translation of *Danger*ⁿ and Rolf Gunold's play about a train disaster, *Bellinzona*.

2.6 Conclusions

It cannot be coincidence that three form-defining plays in three different countries concern themselves with disasters. Germinet and Cusy plainly knew about *Danger*^o and Gunold clearly knew about both *Maremoto* and *Danger*. The advantage of broadcasting was that it crossed national boundaries.

The attraction of such extreme settings was obvious. Cinema audiences loved the thrills of train wrecks and storm-tossed seas and loved being transported to unfamiliar places (which is presumably why Gunold crashed his train on the Swiss/Italian border), but it was prohibitively expensive to film them. On radio, however, all you needed were sound effects and perhaps some musical cues. Better still, on radio you could play your disaster in the dark.

From the outset then the pioneers of the new form recognised that radio drama was more akin to cinema than to theatre. It was a drama of action and thrills set beyond the norm. Flesch was an exception to the "danger in the darkness" paradigm; even so, his "radio grotesque" is cinematic surrealism, impossible to stage.

What the European pioneers realised was that, far from being a limitation, radio's 'blindness' was a tremendous opportunity. Audiences at the theatre or cinema sat and watched whereas radio drama was a participatory activity. Each listener supplied the images prompted by the broadcast words and sounds. A stage play might appeal to the intellect, a film to the senses; both would seek an emotional engagement. But a radio play unfolded uniquely in the imagination of each listener. Here, Flesch had it exactly

ⁿ Broadcast from Hamburg, August 21 1925 (Steven W Lawrie, "'Das Grosse Turnierfeld...'. *German Life and Letters* 51:1 January 1998 p. 123)

^o Germinet (Maurice Vinot) was Radiola's programme director.

right: people experienced plays like *Danger* or *Zauberie* in the same way that a child experiences fairy stories – as an active part of the process.

References

- ¹ Barnouw 1966: 20
- ² Crook 1999: 4-6
- ³ Howard Fink, *The sponsor's v. the nation's choice; North American radio drama*, in Lewis (ed) (1981) *Radio Drama*, p211
- ⁴ McLeod (1998) <http://www.midcoast.com/~lizmcl/wgy.html>
- ⁵ Internet Broadway Database: <http://www.ibdb.com/production.asp?ID=6551>
- ⁶ <http://www.imdb.co.uk/alumni/mainstream/issue35/p10.pd> (Autumn 2003)
- ⁷ Eckersley 1941: 43
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ Quoted by Briggs 1961: 71
- ¹⁰ Barnouw 1966: 137
- ¹¹ Street 2002: 27
- ¹² *Broadcasting To-Day, Start at Marconi House., Rules for Receiving Sets, The Times*, November 14 1922, p 7
- ¹³ Barnouw 1966: 69-70
- ¹⁴ *Broadcasting Begun, First Messages Last Night, News Service Policy, The Times*, November 15 1922
- ¹⁵ Dolan 2003: 329
- ¹⁶ http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/aboutradio4/history/prehistory_char3.shtml
- ¹⁷ *Entertainment by Wireless, The Future of the Electrophone, The Times*, January 10 1923, p 8
- ¹⁸ Reith, *Broadcast Over Britain* p 17, quoted by Briggs 1961: 250
- ¹⁹ Beck 2000: 2.1.19
- ²⁰ Gielgud 1957: 19
- ²¹ Beck 2000: 3.1.1
- ²² Beck 2000: 3.1.17
- ²³ Hughes 1931: 175
- ²⁴ Beck 2000: 3.1.13
- ²⁵ Hughes 1931: 190
- ²⁶ Crook (1999) *British Radio Drama – a Cultural History*, <http://www.irdp.co.uk/britrad.htm>
- ²⁷ Gielgud 1957: 20
- ²⁸ Briggs 1961: 281
- ²⁹ *Broadcasting Plays, The Times*, January 11 1924 p 13
- ³⁰ Russell Taylor (ed) *The Penguin Dictionary of the Theatre*, Penguin, London (revised edition 1970)
- ³¹ <http://imdb.com>
- ³² Beck 2000: 3.1.14
- ³³ Hughes 1931: 176
- ³⁴ Quoted by Crook (1999), *British Radio Drama – a Cultural Case History*, <http://www.irdp.co.uk/britrad.htm>
- ³⁵ *Daily Mail*, January 16 1924 p 7, quoted by Beck (2000) *The Invisible Play*, Chapter 4 para 4.2.11
- ³⁶ Quoted by Crook (1999), *British Radio Drama – a Cultural Case History*, <http://www.irdp.co.uk/britrad.htm>
- ³⁷ Beck 2000: 4.2.4
- ³⁸ *A Million Listeners, The First Year of Broadcasting – Developments in View, The Times*, November 14 1923 p 11
- ³⁹ Todd 2002: 227
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*
- ⁴¹ *Ibid*

Chapter 3: The age of experiment

3.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the developments that took place during the time in office of the BBC's first Head of Drama, R E Jeffrey, appointed in 1924 and ignominiously moved sideways in 1928. On the one hand Jeffrey encouraged radio's first *auteurs*, Peach and Berkeley, to exploit the uniquely personal engagement of broadcast drama with the listener in plays of ideas; on the other, with his staff colleagues Sieveking and Guthrie, he created experimental radio dramatic art as extreme as anything being suggested by European theorists of the avant-garde. In both cases, drama of such range and complexity was only possible due to the development of the BBC's Drama Control Panel and the amount of resources the new Corporation was prepared to devote to the single play.

Berkeley's *Machines* is the case study in this chapter, the first play to be banned by the Director-General, a rare example of an overtly political radio play but also notable for a cinematic technique quite distinct from the theatricality of Berkeley's earlier *The White Château*, radio's first full-length original play.

3.2 The first auteurs: Peach and Berkeley

The second original British radio play was Peach's *Light and Shade*, produced by Jeffrey and aired by 2LO on October 29 1924. As the title indicates, it is another 'blind' play in which a young couple find themselves marooned in a darkened flat. At fifteen minutes it is even shorter than *Danger* but as radio's first comedy *Light and Shade* is more comfortable in the shorter form.

Peach was early radio's most prolific playwright and the first to go into print. His *Broadcast Sketches* (1927) was followed by *Radio Plays* (1931). As the titles suggest, his output falls into two categories; the full-length plays after 1929 are very different from the earlier sketches. In discussing the difference between stage plays of the day

and the new radio form, Peach indicates one major difference between the pioneer radio plays and the much more sophisticated article post-1928:

A stage play need not be about anything in particular as long as it tells a story, but a good radio play must have an idea behind it. Where there is nothing to look at, there must be something to think about; the mind must have something to play with.
[Peach 1931: 10]

There is no script of *Light and Shade* in the archive at Caversham, nor does it appear in *Broadcast Sketches*. The situation, however, may be more complicated than that. One of the longer pieces in *Broadcast Sketches*, one of only three that is likely to last a full fifteen minutes, is *Switched*. *Switched* takes place in “a flat in complete darkness”¹ and the male character – ‘He’ in the script – is called Reggie. His female companion remains simply “She”, but the likelihood is she is Delia, and Reggie and Delia were the *dramatis personae* of *Light and Shade*. The joke of *Switched* is that Reggie and Delia have wandered into the wrong flat in the fog and can’t find the light switch, the in-joke that the threatening voice they hear is actually a play on the radio. The wrong-flat joke seems to have been the twist that ended *Light and Shade*. On the face of it then, *Switched* (1927) is *Light and Shade* (1924) mysteriously renamed.^a

This, however, is Peach before he became a writer of major plays and was still better known as a contributor to *Punch*. Reggie and Delia are his stock “silly-ass” young couple who reappear in *Taps*. *Reggie Makes a Complaint* made up a double bill with what seems to be the first performance of *Switched*, from Belfast, in December 1927.² George and Lucy are Reggie and Delia’s older, slightly more staid equivalent in *All Jam* and *The Séance*. *The Séance*, indeed, recycles the wireless-in-the-dark joke. Peach the humorist is writing radio cartoons. He makes jokes involving the medium and jokes about the medium. In February 1927 he was the first to spoof the weather forecast^b and in *Love or Lucre* he satirises the new phenomenon of running commentary.

In its day, *Light and Shade/Switch* was much more successful than *Danger*, perhaps because Peach was more widely known than Hughes, and was redone many times – in

^a According to his file at Caversham – WAC Copyright, L du Garde Peach, File 1 1926-1935 – Peach was paid 10 guineas for *Switched* in 1926. There is no mention of any other play like *Light and Shade* and evidently no earlier file.

^b In *Here is the Weather Forecast*.

June and August 1925 from Glasgow and Nottingham, June 1926 from Belfast, and from Nottingham again in June 1927. It is ironic, therefore, that when Peach turned to writing full-length radio plays in 1929 he lost airtime. He wrote all his major works in the next two years and by 1934 was working in film, yet he could rightly claim to have “written more radio plays than anyone else in England”³ – not the hundred-plus that has wrongly been extrapolated from this claim but a large number of sketches and the five plays included in his 1931 collection, one of which was recognised as “the best radio play to date.”⁴

The Path of Glory^c is Peach’s masterpiece, a comedy about national finances in time of war, the joke being that both cod-Ruritanian combatants, the Republic of Thalia and the Kingdom of Sardonia, are desperate to lose. The President of Thalia explains to Feraldi, his private secretary:

Thalia cannot afford to win another war. Consider for a moment what happened to Andania-Segovia, so recently defeated by our gallant army. Her currency depreciated to worthless paper, and her national debt disappears. Her army and navy are cut down to an irreducible minimum by the ruthless conqueror – us! – and cost her next to nothing to maintain. Her inhabitants, thanks to wages paid in a depreciated currency, have captured our markets throughout the world.

[Peach 1931: 26]

Peach, however, did not write the first full-length radio play, or indeed the first war play. Those distinctions went to Reginald Berkeley with *The White Château*, commissioned to mark Armistice Night 1925.

Berkeley was a New Zealander who, since coming to Britain, had served as a barrister, a soldier and for two years as Liberal MP for Central Nottingham. He had written for radio before – his thirty-minute “play of the unknown” *The Dweller in the Darkness* was broadcast from London in April 1925 and revived in Aberdeen in June⁵ – but was chiefly known as a successful West End playwright. His biggest hit to date was the World War I comedy, *French Leave* (1920) and in 1925 he premiered two new plays in London, *Mango Island* and *The World’s End*.

^c June 16 1931, produced by Howard Rose.

Berkeley was very much the star and there was never a question of *The White Château* being a collaboration such as that between Hughes and Playfair. Indeed there are doubts as to who produced it. Gielgud, unsurprisingly, claims it was his friend Rose⁶ and Beck, inevitably, states it was Gielgud's predecessor Jeffrey.⁷ Jeffrey had been brought down from Scotland to head the BBC's newly formed Drama Department in the summer of 1924 and Rose was his deputy.^d Jeffrey would certainly have commissioned Berkeley and it would surely be expected that the team leader would take a hands-on approach to the drama event of the year. In the final analysis, however, whoever the producer was, he had nothing very much to add to Berkeley's script. There are sound effects, many of them essential to the action (for example, gunfire in the third scene), but they never drive the action. In modern terms *The White Château* is 'through-written'; everything is on the page. What makes it a radio play is its range, from pre-war 1914 to 1919; its scale, forty-three characters which, even on radio, required a cast of seventeen; and, pre-eminently, its tone.

The White Château is a symbolic play, with the château itself the only continuous 'character'. Sometimes we are inside the building, sometimes outside. We see it occupied, shelled and rebuilt. As J W Marriott notes in the introduction to his *Great Modern British Plays*, which includes the 1927 stage version of *The White Château*, "We are too near the War as yet to be able to use it merely as the background before which character is evolved."⁸ For Berkeley, Flanders becomes an allegorical land, difficult to define, yet historically resonant. The No Man's Land on which the château stands is the same land fought over by the Romans and the Germani, the English and the French, the Catholics and the Protestants.^e *The White Château* is thus more than an anti-war play; it is a pro-peace play, an argument for the League of Nations. By not seeing the death and destruction, we are able to engage with the theme on an intellectual level. Far from being limited by radio, Berkeley recognises its potential as drama for the theatre of the brain.

^d Jeffrey had made his name by being "largely responsible for the theatrical and artistic side of the *Rob Roy* production in Glasgow." [Lewis 1924: 169] He then became station director at Aberdeen where, according to Arthur Burrows, writing a few months after Lewis and around the time of Jeffrey's move to London, "the popularity of Mr Jeffrey could never have been more strikingly demonstrated than when he appeared on the platform one Sunday afternoon about midsummer to conduct the community singing by hundreds of children." Apparently "2000 persons took part." [Burrows 1924: 158-159]

^e See the Workman's monologue in Scene Six – Marriott 1929: 856.

The White Château has claims to be the first masterpiece of radio drama. The BBC certainly marketed it as such. There were trailers for weeks before Armistice Night and a competition was organised to generate maximum interest. This backfired disastrously and brought the BBC to the High Court in the world's first case of "slander by microphone". The Court was informed that:

With a view to increasing public interest in this event, the parties arranged a competition in which listeners were invited to send to the defendants [the BBC], after the broadcast performance on November 11, essays expressive of the impressions created on the listeners by the play. So that listeners might qualify themselves for that competition it was arranged that *The White Château* should be published in book form by the plaintiffs [Williams and Norgate Limited], and that copies of the book should be obtainable through the ordinary sources of supply and from the plaintiffs themselves.⁹

The non-commercial BBC repeatedly advertised the competition – and Williams and Norgate's publication – over the air until November 4 when, concerned about industrial action in the book trade, they announced that, owing to labour troubles, Williams and Norgate could not supply the book when in fact---

The plaintiffs themselves always were able to supply copies of the book, and the statement complained of, made a few days before November 11, caused the plaintiffs actual loss in relation to sales of the book, and, in the plaintiffs' opinion, caused them damage in their business relations.¹⁰

The BBC settled out of court for undisclosed damages. Berkeley would provoke another scandal with his second full-length radio play *Machines*.

3.3 Case study: "Machines" (1927)

Berkeley was radio's first celebrity playwright, *The White Château* something of a jewel in the BBC's crown with regular new productions until 1948,¹¹ yet his next full-length play for radio, *Machines* (1927), was refused – to all intents and purposes banned – reputedly on the instructions of Reith himself.

Machines ran into difficulties not because it was a bad play – far from it – or because it was immoral or obscene, albeit its melodramatic elements do centre on an adulterous

relationship. It was refused purely and simply because it was political. As Jeffrey put it in his letter of refusal, dated October 27 1927, “The subject of the play is far too controversial for broadcasting.”¹² Berkeley himself went further in a letter to the *Times* of February 27 1928,¹³ referring to “the fact that a play of mine, *Machines*, commissioned by the BBC on an approved scenario, has been banned solely on the ground that it is ‘politically controversial’”. Eighty years on it is hard to appreciate how controversial the subject matter of the play would have been in 1927. In essence Berkeley was advocating a second General Strike barely eighteen months after the first.

Machines is the story of Mansell, who rises from the factory floor to the House of Commons as the champion of the working man. Berkeley gives Mansell all the attributes of an idealistic hero – he is a conscientious objector, imprisoned during the War, but “He has the Albert Medal of the first class for life-saving”¹⁴ and his lover likens him to Siegfried.¹⁵ His Industrial League is portrayed as a good thing, far better than the oppressive Trades Unions.^f A Parliament of factory owners, of course, cannot see the sense of working with their factory hands and so the Industrial League calls a General Strike. To prevent the strike, the Tories set out to discredit Mansell. The blimpish Colonel Willoughby tells press baron Lord Bouverie that Mansell is being funded by the Russians. In fact Mansell’s money comes from his lover, Willoughby’s daughter Joyce. The Party instructs a “private inquiry agent” who discovers that Mansell is already married. Mansell is expelled from the Commons for trying to make a personal statement repudiating the scandalous reports about him. The Home Secretary authorises a Special Branch raid on the offices of the Worker’s Industrial Fellowship. The officers find Mansell standing over Joyce’s dead body. She tried to leave him - “I’d sooner marry a leper than a liar”¹⁶ – and he lashed out. The last headlines Mansell makes are when he meets the hangman.

As if a General Strike were not controversial enough, Berkeley adds an obvious reference to the faked Zinoviev Letter that helped bring down the first Labour government in 1924, a matter-of-fact allusion to Government dirty tricks, legally dubious Special Branch activities and a very thinly disguised Lord Rothermere, owner of the *Daily Mirror* in Bouverie Street for most of the Twenties.¹⁷ Berkeley knew full

^f “If I want to see the workers free from the tyranny of the industrial machine, I also want to see them free from the tyranny of their own Unions.” [Berkeley 1927: 46]

well what he was doing and claimed to see no problem with controversy. In reply to Jeffrey he wrote:

To condemn any work of art in any circumstances because it is 'controversial' is an absurdity. Controversy is the very breath of intellectual life and development. Moreover, absurd as a criterion of works of art in general, this test becomes the wildest nonsense when applied to the drama; for the whole essence of drama is conflict.
[Berkeley 1927: 7]

Later in the same letter he asks bluntly, "Is the British Broadcasting Corporation an annexe of the Conservative Central Office? Is that the quarter from which you are afraid of attack?"¹⁸

It was a question many on the Left were asking in 1927. The BBC Berkeley had written for in 1925 was a different entity from the BBC he challenged two years later.

The joint stock Company had become a Corporation established by charter, in theory independent, in practice ultimately answerable to the government of the day. Between 1922 and early 1926 there had been a general, unspecified veto on controversial broadcasting.¹⁹ This sounds draconian but in practice was largely irrelevant. Father Ronald Knox's *Broadcasting from the Barricades*⁸ is a case in point, a partly-pastoral, partly-political talk in dramatic form, intended to illustrate the potential consequences of the current industrial unrest. The veteran BBC announcer Stuart Hibberd recalled:

Father Knox was speaking from Edinburgh, letting his imagination run riot... Of course, there was the usual studio opening announcement explaining that what followed was fiction, but the difficulty was that so many listeners either did not hear or did not understand that announcement, or began to listen after the talk had started and thought it was an actual description of scenes of mob violence in London at that very moment.^h [Hibberd 1950: 16]

Airing less than three weeks before the General Strike, this was certainly controversial, yet no heads rolled and the BBC's licence was not threatened. The Strike itself, May 3 to May 12 1926, was a different proposition. Newspapers could not be published and the BBC instantly became the only national source of information.

⁸ April 16 1926.

^h Precisely the scenario which resulted in 'mass hysteria' with *War of the Worlds* twelve years later. See Chapter 5.

Winston Churchill wanted “to commandeer the broadcasting medium during the crisis”²⁰ but Reith had already persuaded Prime Minister Baldwin of the need to preserve BBC impartiality. Officially, the stated position was that the BBC “had no opinions of its own and would give only objective news.”²¹ But BBC officials moved into the Admiralty on May 4 and the news bulletins were jointly written by Reith’s deputy and an aide to J C C Davidson, Deputy Chief Civil Commissioner.²² Davidson was a neighbour and friend of Reith’s; he also had editorial control over Churchill’s propaganda sheet, *The British Journal*. Effectively, he soon had control over the BBC, too. When Reith wanted to broadcast a speech by Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald, Davidson forbade it “because ‘it would set Churchill off again’. There was a limit, after all, to the BBC’s autonomy and to Reith’s independence.”²³

That autumn the government accepted the main recommendation of the Crawford Committee that the BBC should become an independent public body incorporated by charter. On New Year’s Eve the British Broadcasting Company died and on January 1 1927 the British Broadcasting Corporation was born. Its first Chairman of Governors was Lord Clarendon, previously Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Dominions. Tracey’s conclusion that “More than anything the events of May 1926 clarified the context within which ‘impartiality’ functions— involving an almost total, if oblique, accommodation to government needs and interests”²⁴ is justified but not so moving as Berkeley’s conclusion to his preface to the published edition of *Machines*, dated November 27 1927:

A great instrument of intellectual development is being blunted and misused for want of courage. It is no good replying that British broadcasting is better than any other. It ought to be.

And it ought to be better than it is.

[Berkeley 1927: 23]

Machines itself demonstrates a substantial shift away from stage conventions towards a drama conceived in sound. Berkeley subtitles the play *A Symphony of Modern Life* and its fourteen scenes flow like movements in a musical work. In *The White Château* Berkeley had felt obliged to use a Chronicler to set each scene and to ram

home the theme to his audience. Eighteen months later he is much more inclined to trust the listener's intelligence. The play begins:

The opening of a door is heard. The music blends into the hum and bustle of a great factory – with a whirring of many wheels and belts, the grinding of lathes, the snapping of steel bolt-cutters, and, from time to time, the heavy fall of hydraulic hammers. It all forms a kind of crude musical pattern.

[Berkeley 1927:27]

1927 was the year of *Metropolis* and Berkeley creates an image in sound of giant machines chewing up and spitting out the hands that tend them. He has clearly realised the unequalled ability of radio to convey the indescribably huge. He also experiments with montage, disjointed snatches of conversation as the hands shuffle out of the factory in Scene Two and overlapping snatches of gossip to introduce Mansell's wife - "A treacly, lachrymose contralto"²⁵ – in Scene Four. Two years earlier Berkeley would probably have ended his play with some sort of final thoughts from Mansell on his way to be hanged. In 1927 he deals with it obliquely, unspecified people on a bus discussing the day's scandal. The final action of the play is sound.

Ting-ting on the starting bell. The omnibus lumbers away. A neighbouring clock strikes the half-hour. The chimes blend in to the rhythmical clangour of machinery, bring the play to an end.

[Berkeley 1927:192]

It has to be borne in mind, however, that *Machines* was never performed. To get his play on air Berkeley would no doubt have been required to make compromises, not merely in terms of content but also in terms of style. The question has to be asked, could his "symphony" have been performed given the technology of 1927, which had scarcely moved on since Playfair had tried blowing up Hughes's mine in 1924? It would be another year before the Dramatic Control Panel appeared and without it quick fades and mixes would almost certainly have been beyond the capacity of Savoy Hill.

3.4 The Experimentalists: “The First Kaleidoscope” (1928)

Even before the *Machines* affair, the Drama Department was in difficulties. “It was agreed that all was not well in the Dramatic Dept.,” the Control Board Minutes for October 27 1925 recorded.²⁶ George Grossmith “was not functioning in the way it was at first thought he might.”ⁱ Unfortunately there is no record of Grossmith’s appointment, title or mission. There was talk of appointing Donald Calthrop, shortly to become famous as the blackmailer in Hitchcock’s *Blackmail*, at a salary of £1500 a year. Again there is no indication what role he would fulfil beyond replacing Grossmith. It was noted on December 30 that Calthrop was demanding more money and there is no further mention of him in the minutes.^j

Perhaps the thinking behind the appointment of well-known stage figures was to build bridges with the commercial theatre and curtail the boycott. In other respects the Drama Department was well staffed with a Head (Jeffrey), a Deputy (Rose), and several producers. In fact there were more producers than there were plays to be produced. In terms of original radio drama there was a debate as to what the new form actually was and where it might go.

Jeffrey came into post recognising the unique intimacy of radio drama. He wrote an introductory article for the *Radio Times*:^k

The amazing advantage of listening, without sight, to words which are arranged to build emotion-compelling situations, is that every person places the emotion in a setting fitted to, or known by, him. Thus the emotion becomes a power inter-acting with a personal experience. Here the artificiality is entirely done away with, and if the ability of the speakers is of a really high order, the emotion of the situation is universally accepted...

The tone smacks of a Futurist manifesto and certainly prefigures Arnheim’s concept of Sound Art.^l Jeffrey was an advocate of experiment yet could not wholly accept the

ⁱ This is Grossmith Junior (circa 1874-1935) the musical comedy star.

^j Allan and Allan 1948: 97 seem to believe that Calthrop held office *between* Jeffrey and Gielgud.

^k The quotation is from Jeffrey’s typed manuscript, *Wireless Drama*, dated September 1924, (WAC R19/276) Entertainment, Drama Department 1924-1948.

^l See Chapters 5 and 13.

divergence of radio drama from stage drama. He believed, for example, that radio plays should be performed before an audience. In May 1926, "The Dramatic Producer raised the whole question of whether plays should not be given with a visible audience, and in order to assist the artists in reaction, to give applause etc."²⁷ Two years later, towards the end of his short tenure, Jeffrey produced an undated document, presumably intended for internal circulation, titled "The Drama Studio".²⁸

Jeffrey envisaged an external facility where "works of deep significance and power which already exist in the language" [i.e. stage plays] could be performed in a radiogenic way to live audiences. "The artist," he reasoned, "especially the one who expresses himself by internal force translated by speech and posture must express to *someone*." The audience, however, should not behave like an audience. "The scene is over. No applause follows. The audience is but watching an artistic picture." He describes the picture: "self-coloured canvas draped over irregular forms, and lighted in such a way [as] to produce quite a definite effect."

Clearly Jeffrey was still struggling with the shortage of original radio plays. In October 1926 Lewis, on Jeffrey's behalf, proposed a competition along the lines of the French model. The Board rejected the idea, agreeing instead "that individual negotiations with authors with whom members of the staff are on personal terms should be developed, much greater results being likely to come in this way."²⁹ The intention was either to circumvent the boycott or at least avoid making matters worse. This, however, would remain the BBC's official policy on commissioning radio plays for almost thirty years and completely stifle the artistic development of the Drama Department. In the short term, ironically, it had the opposite effect.

A major disincentive for professional playwrights inclined to write for radio was the low level of fees. Peach, for example, was paid £50 for two performances of *The Path of Glory*.³⁰ Jeffrey's answer was to write radio plays himself and to persuade those around him to do the same, for which they were paid nothing extra – indeed, Lewis left the BBC and effectively became the first freelance writer-producer because he could earn so much more in fees than salary.^m All Jeffrey's team, with the possible exception

^m Lewis was paid £45 for his dramatisation of *Lord Jim* (April 11 1928). For producing *The Night Fighters* he was paid £7 10s for the London Region (5GB) performance on Saturday March 24 1928 and

of the much older Rose, were experimentally and technologically minded, traits that could be united by A G D West's new Dramatic Control Panel.

The DCP was radio drama's technological Great Leap Forward, not so much in terms of sound quality, which is always determined by the quality of the receiver, but in terms of what could now be done. With several studios linked by the panel, a producer could have his principals in one studio, a crowd in another, an orchestra in a third and sounds effects in a fourth. He could cut between them on the flick of a switch or fade them in as gently as he chose. Drama now flowed like a film. There need be no more shuffling for a place at the microphone, no more background artistes accidentally drowning out the leads. Stereo and DAB would later enhance the listening experience but only recording would subsequently add anything to the scope of radio drama.

Cecil Lewis exploited the filmic potential of the panel with his cross-Channel thriller *Pursuit*.ⁿ Lewis's departmental colleague Charles Lefeaux thought the piece "Very thrilling and capable of holding one's attention throughout. Noise effects good and produced the necessary result."³¹ Cecil Graves, on the other hand, complained to Programme Director Roger Eckersley:

The play itself was, of course, a very poor specimen and could have been written by a child, but *that* Lewis I know realised as he was out for effects and new technique and nothing more. [...] The noises were not particularly good. It rather showed us up as only being capable of dealing with such things as telephone bells, motor cars, aeroplanes or motor boats.³²

Jeffrey's play *Speed* evidently worked on similar lines but the first work to truly test the potential of the new technology was Lance Sieveking's *Kaleidoscope*.^o

The panel was Sieveking's instrument. In his memoir-cum-anthology *The Stuff of Radio* (1934) he is pictured "playing Number One Dramatic Control Panel". This is the Broadcasting House panel, a second-generation panel with smooth Art Deco lines, lots of knobs and a big round studio relay microphone on top. The original panel at Savoy

£15 for the National performance (2LO) on Monday March 26. (WAC Plays, Lewis, Cecil A, File 1A 1925-April 1928).

ⁿ 2LO January 7 1928

^o 2LO September 4 1928

Hill – the panel on which Sieveking played *Kaleidoscope* – was built on an ordinary office table. The cue lights were bell-pushes. Sieveking describes how it worked:

The eleven controls on the DC panel are arranged in two groups of five each, with one control at the top of the centre of the panel. Any of the fade controls in the two groups of five can be associated with any studio which is being used for a production, and their outputs can be mixed in any desired manner. The eleventh control is entirely independent, and is intended primarily for use with the principal studio. For instance, it can be used for the main part of a play and the programme material from other studios superimposed via the other ten fade controls.
[Sieveking 1934: 402]

Sieveking was both eclectic and eccentric, much like his friends the Sitwells with whom he created the poetic radio “fantasy in three parts” *The Wheel of Time* (1926), in which, “The years roll on. Art and manners change. The voices of the Past, the Present, and the Future speak out of the void.”³³ Evidently the ambition of the piece went beyond the capability of the technology. Sieveking writes that it “achieved a sort of Fonthill Abbey in sound.”³⁴

The DCP, on the other hand, was more than capable of keeping pace with an imagination teeming with ideas and fuelled by an intense passion for the medium. To modern sensibilities, numbed by decades of less demanding broadcasting, Sieveking’s *Kaleidoscope*^p both looks and sounds in description very alien. The full text was never published, presumably because Sieveking conceived it solely in terms of sound, with text only used to give the actors their lines and him his cues at the panel. He nevertheless includes a short extract in *The Stuff of Radio*, partly to illustrate one of his themes, the question of how best to print radio plays.

MAN: What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do? I want to go one way and I am torn another. Shall I stay with her, and try to work and make her happy? or shall I go away, forget and be free? Which? Which?

3rd KALEIDO

ORCHESTRA: Beginning of 4th MOVEMENT.

FINALE 5TH SYMPH. BEETHOVEN.

MUSICAL BOX.

BAD: Last night, oh, yesternight, betwixt your lips and mine
There fell thy shadow, Cynara! thy breath was shed

^p It would not become *The First Kaleidoscope* until Sieveking ‘scored’ a second the following year (Sieveking 1934: 384).

Upon my soul between the kisses and the wine;
 (Continuous double fan mix.)
 And I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
 Yea, I was desolate and bow'd my head:
 (Flick 8 quick.)
 I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.
 PIANO: CHOPIN 17TH PRELUDE.
 QUINTET: "MY QUEEN".
 DANCE BAND: "ECCENTRIC".
 (FADE UP ORCHESTRA ... FADE DOWN.)
 (FADE UP JAZZ ... FADE DOWN.)
 (FADE OUT EFFECTS, SPEAKERS, PIANO and QUINTET.)
 [Sieveking 1934: 383-384]

Hughes and Berkeley had devised radio plays, but there had been plays for two-and-a-half millennia, and *Danger* and *Machines* have all the conventional constituent elements of protagonist, antagonist, hubris and catharsis. *Kaleidoscope* really has none of these things – its central character does not even have a name, let alone character traits. What Sieveking achieved was a new art form.

3.5 12 Great Plays (1928)

The *Machines* affair must certainly have weakened Jeffrey's position, but what ended his tenure, and thwarted any ambitions his deputy Rose might have had for the succession, was the *Twelve Great Plays* season of 1928/9.

The idea was laudable, to bring classics of World Theatre to a vast new audience, but it was over-ambitious, premature and far too long. The plays chosen were extreme, ranging from a difficult Shakespeare to a very minor Strindberg via a fifth century Sanskrit drama. The published programme was as follows:³⁵

September	<i>King Lear</i>	Shakespeare
October	<i>The Betrothal</i>	Maeterlinck
November	<i>The Pretenders</i>	Ibsen
December	<i>Life's a Dream</i>	Calderon
January	<i>The Fantasticks</i>	Rostand
February	<i>Sakuntala</i>	Khalidasa
March	<i>La Giaconda</i>	D'Annunzio
April	<i>The Cherry Orchard</i>	Chekhov

May	<i>There are Crimes and Crimes</i>	Strindberg
June	<i>Minna von Barnhelm</i>	Lessing
July	<i>Electra</i>	Euripides
August	To be announced	Bernard Shaw

Twelve months was, with the benefit of hindsight, an excessive commitment, with two performances a month using up a significant amount of limited resources and something like 20% of all drama airtime. The main problem, though, was the assumption that there was a significant audience for ancient Indian drama, even older Greek, and an unhealthy slice of Northern European gloom. Eighty years on, Radio 3 might attempt any of the plays but it would never commit itself to all of them. In 1928 drama itself was a novelty to a significant number of listeners. Equally, broadcast drama technique was not sufficiently developed to deal with such material. All the plays were adapted, of course, to fit the ninety-minute slot. Rather than write new material, or transpose scenes or dialogue to keep the drama moving, the tendency was to use a narrator. In the Ibsen, at least, the narrator was called 'The Reader'. There is a review in *The Times* which neatly summarises the damage this does: "The Reader who bridges, with explanatory summaries, the gaps left by the wireless version of the play, though he is necessary in the circumstances and does his task well, serves to emphasise the gaps."³⁶

Crook quotes Rose's reaction to criticism of the series: "It was never intended that they should be regarded as popular in any sense of the term. They were definitely chosen for their literary value."³⁷ This is highly revealing. At a time when Sieveking and Guthrie were creating new dramatic forms for radio, the Deputy Head of Drama at the BBC had so little confidence in his medium that he was choosing 'classic' plays that read better than they played.

The BBC was bullish in the face of widespread criticism. Eleven of the twelve plays were produced as scheduled⁹ and the official stance was that the series was "the first considered effort of a broadcasting organisation to give the listener constructive examples of the world's drama masterpieces and to do for drama what broadcasting has

⁹ The Shaw play may well have been *Saint Joan*. If so, it was removed from the floundering series and given a prestigious production in April 1929. See Chapter 4.

already done for music.”³⁸ Inside the Corporation, however, *Twelve Great Plays* was clearly viewed as a disaster. Jeffrey lost his job halfway through the series and Rose was permanently passed over for promotion. Their failing had not been the experiment – indeed, in terms of production and adaptive technique the *Twelve Great Plays* may well have been too reverential. The fundamental weakness of the series was the obscurity of its material. As Jeffrey’s replacement assured the Controller of Programmes when tentatively proposing a second World Theatre season in 1937, “care will be taken to avoid falling into the pitfall which ruined ‘The Twelve Great Plays of 1928’, when entertainment value was unreasonably omitted from the calculations of the limitations of that scheme.”³⁹

3.6 The end of experiment

If Sieveking invented a new form akin to drama, then the next master of the dramatic control panel took drama where it had never really ventured before, inside the human head. Sieveking was an aesthete, Tyrone Guthrie a radical. Sieveking wrote “rhythms” about life and death whereas Guthrie wrote plays about ordinary people with ordinary problems but did so in a startlingly radical way.

Both had their successors. For Sieveking it was Walter Ruttmann, who in *Weekend* made an audiomontage of June 13 1930 on the soundtrack of film for Hans Flesch’s *Berlin Radio Hour*,¹ John Cage, and the sound artists who merge language with musical forms. For Guthrie it was Samuel Beckett.

Guthrie and Beckett were near contemporaries and both descended from the Anglo-Irish upper middleclass. Both saw the human condition as one of restriction and constriction. Beckett famously externalises these on stage as urns and dustbins whereas Guthrie internalises them. With Guthrie, progressively, the listener gets inside the main character’s head – the perfect metaphor for radio drama, which unfolds inside the listener’s head.

¹ See Chapter 5.

The particular restrictions which fuel Guthrie's drama are those that parents, on behalf of society and good governance, shackle their children with. In the first of his microphone plays, *Squirrel's Cage* (1929) young Henry Wilson has scarcely been born when a cacophony of voices – billed in the *Times* as “The Wireless Chorus”⁴⁰ – are telling him he can't do this or mustn't do that. Years later, when Henry is courting Ivy at the dance hall, she keeps telling him “don't” when she really means “all right then”. Finally, with Henry tied down by his monotonous job and domineering wife, he finds himself telling baby Johnny that he's not to do this, not to do that.

It is a universal story told in an unusual way. Guthrie dispenses entirely with a narration. To separate his scenes, he uses “interludes” of sound. The marriage of Henry and Ivy is dealt with simply by playing “a fragment of Mendelssohn's ‘Wedding March’”.⁴¹ Interlude V echoes both Sieveking and Berkeley in *Machines*.

The effect should be a composite image of the ‘Commuter's’ Day – trains fading into typewriters – railway-lines merging into lines of print – the columns of bobbing bowlers into columns of pounds, shillings and pence ... Dissolving views.
[Guthrie 1931: 75]

Squirrel's Cage was the most successful original British radio play of 1929.⁴² *The Flowers Are Not For You To Pick* (1930) goes one step further – a young Irish missionary, Edward, has fallen from the ship taking him to China and is about to go down for the third time. His life, literally, flashes before him. The wit and delicacy of Guthrie's writing – the affection with which Edward looks back on his limited life – cushions the realisation that we are listening, for the first time, to a fifty-minute internal monologue.

I suppose if anyone was watching they would see a chain of bubbles – floating, bobbing to the surface ... bob, bob, bob, bob, bob, bob, surface ... they say one rises to the surface ... three times ... and after that ... I wonder ... There go my spectacles ... sinking ... sinking ... *I knew I'd shed them off at last.* ... One thing, I'm glad I went down in my dog-collar. [Guthrie 1931: 205]

The third of Guthrie's microphone plays, *Matrimonial News*, goes further still, from internal monologue to stream of consciousness. An Announcer tells us:

What follows is supposed to be happening in the mind of Miss Florence Kippings, – who is sitting alone in a cheap restaurant in the Strand in London.

The time is about a quarter to twelve, midday. She has ordered a cup of coffee...
Remember you are overhearing her thoughts – she is alone. [Guthrie 1931: 87]

We are *listening to her thoughts*, ostensibly as they occur; random thoughts – the idea of her mother, the idea of her friend Alice, the idea of a man and other phantoms. Florence is Winnie in *Happy Days*, thirty years before Beckett created her.

What *will* he be like---
What *will* he be like---
What will he be like---
What will he---
What will he be---
Tit Willoughby---
Tit Willoughby---
Bit Willoughby---
Sit Willoughby---
Feeling giddy---
How my heart beats
Giddy. Giddy. Giddy---
Hope my nose isn't shiny---

[Guthrie 1931: 98]

Chothia is writing about Guthrie when she states: “Soliloquy, and its modern form, stream of consciousness, which had proved a problem in the realistic theatre, found a place in radio drama, disembarassed of the solid visual presence of actors pretending not to overhear or freezing awkwardly while a character expresses his or her inmost thoughts.”⁴³ She concludes, “Guthrie uses not sound effects so much as voice and voices to explore the experience behind the commonplace mask.”⁴⁴

Ian Rodger makes a key point when he writes, “Both Guthrie and Sieveking were attempting to find a dramatic form in which their characters would be easily recognisable to this new random audience which did not necessarily share the private jokes and limited social consensus to be found in the theatre.”⁴⁵

The most striking thing about Sieveking’s *Kaleidoscope* and Guthrie’s first two microphone plays is that they were broadcast not to a cultured elite or on a specialist channel; they went out on the single national channel at what would today be called “primetime”– and millions of people listened. But *Matrimonial News*, written in 1930, was not broadcast until 1938. The experimentalists had fallen from favour with the Drama Department.

3.7 Conclusions

The first age of experiment in British radio drama began with plays of ideas and ended with plays that were as experimental as anything that would be attempted on public radio before the rebirth of radio in postwar Europe. Sieveking and Guthrie in particular demonstrated that radio drama was not only essentially different from stage drama but also potentially the platform for a drama of the intangible, of thought itself.

The instrument on which such dramas were created was the Dramatic Control Panel which itself put British radio drama in advance of potential rivals on the continent of Europe or in America. After 1930, however, development ceased, both technologically and artistically. The first Head of Drama, Jeffrey, was removed from post and replaced by an unsuccessful stage actor who wrote stage plays and came of a theatrical dynasty. From 1929 to 1939 the main aim of the BBC Drama Department was to bring radio plays and stage plays closer together.

References

- ¹ Peach 1927: 15
- ² *The Times*, Wednesday December 14 1927, p. 6
- ³ Peach 1931: 12
- ⁴ Peach 1931: 13
- ⁵ *The Times, Programmes*, April 16 1925 p 7 and June 19 1925 p 18
- ⁶ Gielgud 1957: 22
- ⁷ Beck 2000: 5.5.2
- ⁸ Marriott 1929: 9
- ⁹ *The Times*, April 24 1926, p 5
- ¹⁰ *Ibid*
- ¹¹ Beck 2000: 2.1.11
- ¹² Berkeley 1927: 5
- ¹³ *Nurse Cavell Film, REGINALD BERKELEY, The Times*, Feb 27, 1928, pg 15
- ¹⁴ Berkeley 1927: 59
- ¹⁵ Berkeley 1927: 54
- ¹⁶ Berkeley 1927: 182
- ¹⁷ <http://www.bl.uk/collections/radio/>
- ¹⁸ Berkeley 1927: 9
- ¹⁹ Tracey 2003: 8
- ²⁰ Symons 1957: 178
- ²¹ Symons 1957: 181
- ²² Tracey 2003: 16
- ²³ Symons 1957: 181
- ²⁴ Tracey 2003: 23

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- ²⁵ Berkeley 1927: 72
- ²⁶ Control Board Minutes 1925 (WAC R3/3/1)
- ²⁷ Control Board Minutes 1926 (WAC R3/3/2), May 5 1926
- ²⁸ (WAC R19/276) Entertainment, Drama Department 1924-1948
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- ³⁰ WAC Copyright, L du Garde Peach, File 1 1926-1935
- ³¹ Head Office Staff Comments January 19 1928 (WAC, Plays, Lewis, Cecil A, File IA 1925-April 1928)
- ³² Cecil Graves to R Eckersley, "Pursuit" 2LO January 7 1928 (WAC, Plays, Lewis, Cecil A, File IA 1925-April 1928)
- ³³ Beck 2000: 6.1.5
- ³⁴ Sieveking 1934: 16
- ³⁵ *The Times*, The World's Drama: Twelve Plays to be Broadcast, September 1 1928, pg 10
- ³⁶ *The Times*, Ibsen by Wireless, November 14 1928, pg 14
- ³⁷ Crook, <http://www.irdp.co.uk/GIELGUD/valbbc12.htm>
- ³⁸ *The Times*, Broadcasting in 1928, January 1 1929, pg 21
- ³⁹ Val Gielgud, "Dramatic Policy, October/December 1937" (WAC R19/280/3)
- ⁴⁰ *The Times*, Monday March 4 1929
- ⁴¹ Guthrie 1931: 70
- ⁴² Crook (2004) *Val Gielgud and the BBC*, <http://www.irdp.co.uk/GIELGUD/valbbc13.htm>
- ⁴³ Chothia 1996: 257
- ⁴⁴ Chothia 1996: 259
- ⁴⁵ Rodger 1982: 19-20

Chapter 4: Adaptation and the single play 1929-1939

4.1 Introduction

On January 1 1929 Val Gielgud replaced Jeffrey as Head of Drama at the BBC. Both Crook and Beck have written extensively about Gielgud. He is impossible to ignore. Until his retirement in 1963 Gielgud officially *was* BBC drama, both on radio and TV. He created the policy by which plays were selected (and in the early days selected them personally), he controlled the studios in which they were produced, selected the producers and, certainly during the war years, selected the actors who could play in the repertory.

Gielgud was by no means a paragon. His personality leaps out of his writings. He is shameless in self-promotion, inflexible in his opinions and outrageous in his nepotism. That said, Gielgud's faults are largely responsible for the survival of radio drama in Britain when it fell by the wayside in other countries. His dominance meant there was never a question of drama migrating entirely to TV as it did in America. His middle-of-the-road tastes ensured that British radio drama never abandoned the mainstream audience for the purely avant-garde as happened in Germany. His nepotism meant that his protégés were still in post, still defending his legacy, when radio drama seemed suddenly old-fashioned and fragile in TV's *Play for Today* era of the late Sixties and early Seventies.

This chapter focuses on Gielgud's first decade in post, his early radio plays and his first writings about the process of radio drama. Inevitably, for someone with such a theatrical background, Gielgud always saw radio drama as an inferior form. His major coup, therefore, in the 1930s was to commission two original radio plays from the most successful stage dramatist of the day, Patrick Hamilton. More influential in the long term, however, were the sentimental plays of mass appeal developed by Gielgud's in-house favourite of the period, Philip Wade.

4.2 The appointment of Gielgud

Three-quarters of a century on, the appointment of a twenty-eight year old with neither qualifications nor experience to a position of total dominance within an autonomous department of a national monopoly might raise eyebrows. At the time, though, it was the norm. Radio was then a young person's medium. Reith himself was only eleven years Gielgud's senior.

Gielgud begins his own account of his appointment with unconvincing self-deprecation: "There can be little doubt that I owed this astonishing opportunity less to any obvious qualifications for the job in question than to the absence of any outstandingly obvious alternative." Two sentences later he admits having helped to engineer the vacancy by writing "- under a pseudonym – a number of letters to the *Radio Times* dealing, I fear rather critically, with certain aspects of the work of R E Jeffrey's department."¹ To fully appreciate the duplicity behind that admission it helps to know that Gielgud spent the second half of 1928 as assistant to the editor of the *Radio Times*, with particular responsibility for the letters page. Such ruthlessness would stand him in good stead in tackling the first problem of his incumbency and an antagonist even more opinionated than himself.

From the earliest days the BBC had been trying to get the plays of Bernard Shaw onto the wireless. Shaw was clearly the greatest living playwright and had the 1925 Nobel Prize to prove it. Shaw scarcely needed publicity and, having married a woman much wealthier than himself, he did not need the fee. The decision had therefore been taken to humour the great man. In November 1924 Shaw was allowed to play all the parts in a production of his minor one-acter *O'Flaherty VC* (1917). In January 1926 his feeble farce *Passion, Poison and Petrification* (1905) was given a rare airing, followed in March 1928 by the much more substantial *The Man of Destiny* (1896). The target, by this time, was Shaw's masterpiece, *Saint Joan* (1923). The initial problem was that Shaw had hated the production of *Man of Destiny*, calling it "abominable".² The most senior of executives, Roger Eckersley, brother of Peter and Chairman of the Programme Board, worked on Shaw over the Christmas period and secured agreement in writing on January 14 1929.³ Shaw accepted a modest fee of £50 but retained the final say over

casting. Practically, of course, with *Saint Joan* still playing in theatres around the world, he retained control of everything.

Casting caused no great difficulties. Shaw insisted on Dorothy Holmes Gore for Joan and the producer Cecil Lewis brought in Milton Rosmer to recreate his stage role of Gilles de Rais. The massive, seemingly insuperable problem was the play's estimated running time of three and three-quarter hours. Gielgud's first suggestion was to air the play in full on a Sunday afternoon when it need not be interrupted by the news. The Presbyterian Reith would not countenance drama on the Sabbath, which left Gielgud's second suggestion – cutting the play into two parts. Again, Reith was opposed. Never before had dramatic works been delivered on British radio by instalment. Even dramatisations of novels such as *Westward Ho!* (1925)^a and Lewis's version of *Lord Jim* (1927) had been single programmes lasting 60 and 100 minutes respectively. Reith wanted Eckersley to persuade Shaw to cut his epic by more than a third. Shaw – it can have surprised no one – flatly refused. Shaw, however, approved the idea of bisection.^b

Thus *Saint Joan* went out Thursday April 25 1929 from 7.30 to 9.00⁴ and on Friday April 26 from 9.20 to midnight.⁵ The immensity of the undertaking was recognised by *The Times*, which reviewed the broadcast at length on the Saturday. The reviewer praised Lewis, who “wisely made no attempt to convert *Saint Joan* into ‘Radio Drama,’ but relied on the simplest form of production”, but disliked the split. “It would have been better boldly to put courage (the producer's and the listeners') to the test and give the complete play on the one evening, with, perhaps, a fairly long interval of music in the middle...”⁶

“Gielgud had done well in his first test as a producer of serious drama at the BBC,” Conolly concludes, “and his reputation and influence grew rapidly.”⁷ The problem for would-be writers of original radio drama was that Gielgud had made his name with a stage play. On the one hand it is right and proper for the BBC as educator and disseminator of culture to mount radio productions of classic and contemporary stage

^a Inevitably credited by Gielgud to Rose (Gielgud 1957: 21) but credited by *The Times* to “Mr A Whitman” (*The Times*, Thursday, November 19 1925, p. 7).

^b He stipulated a split between Scenes V and VI, the coronation at Rheims, whereas Gielgud had proposed ending Part One with Scene IV. In dramatic terms it makes no difference. Scene IV ends with an English chaplain threatening to personally burn Joan at the stake (Shaw 1946: 126), Scene V with the French Archbishop predicting Joan's doom (*Ibid*, 139).

plays for the benefit of the non-metropolitan majority. In purely pragmatic terms it is a risk-free undertaking; scholars have propounded on the classics, critics and the paying public on contemporary work. But airtime for drama of any kind was limited in the 1930s. With Gielgud relying on adaptations of stage plays and, increasingly, dramatised novels and stories, the opportunities for original plays were sorely restricted.^c

Gielgud was able to broadcast contemporary stage plays because the boycott by the West End closed-shop had ended, not least because Reith had personally brokered an agreement to moderate James Agate's broadcast criticism of London productions.^d Paradoxically, now that successful stage actors were available for radio work, Gielgud chose to create his first radio repertory company. The eight members – five male, three female – were Andrew Churchman, Frank Denton, Harman Grisewood, Lionel Millard, Philip Wade, Barbara Couper, Lillian Harrison and Gladys Young, all of whose contracts began on January 1 1930 and ran initially for a year.^e Harrison was dismissed on March 31 "as she did not represent a paying proposition"⁹ and replaced by Katherine Hynes. As the junior member Hynes was paid £5 a week, where the seniors received either £8 or £7. The total cost of the company up to June 28 was £1564. Not employing the actors on salary but hiring them freelance would have cost ten shillings more, according to the report presented to the Production Executive. The decision to serve notice on the company members, effective December 31 1930, was therefore not financial but qualitative. However Churchman, Couper, Young and Wade were all members of the second Repertory Company^c and Grisewood was one of the busiest radio actors before becoming Controller of the Third Programme, thus the problem was not entirely one of bad acting.

^c Take, for example, the programme for the fourth quarter of 1932, announced in *The Times* (Tuesday September 6 1932, p. 10): "Although two or three works have been written for the microphone, most of the material for the autumn season has been taken from the theatre." Stage plays included *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Forest* (Galsworthy), *The Immortal Lady* (Clifford Bax), *Bird in Hand* (Drinkwater) and *The White Blackbird* (Lennox Robinson). The original radio plays were *Nor'west* (Peach), *The Family Man* (Wade), an untitled tercentenary play about Christopher Wren by Whitaker Wilson and *Conversations at the Dance* by Hermynia Zur Muhler, "a series of connected scenes rather than a play ... described as a cross-section of life seen through the eyes of people dancing and talking together on various historical occasions."

^d The "Agreement between Mr Agate and the BBC" contains the memorable Clause 1, "Plays which are morally bad or cheap, and generally representative of the commercial prostitution of the stage, will not be referred to at all." (Reith to Agate, October 29 1929, Policy, Dramatic Criticism 1929-1936 (WAC R34/366))

^e See Chapter 7.

There is a fascinating internal circulating memo in the archive at Caversham, a record of the meeting held on July 7 1930 “to discuss the future of the repertory company.”¹⁰ All the shapers of BBC radio drama were present – Gielgud, of course, Rose, Sieveking, Peter Cresswell and E J King Bull – with Mr Brown to represent “the economic side”. Rose defended his personal favourites, Grisewood and Wade – “a good juvenile and a good character man” respectively – but as for the rest believed “that better results could be obtained by casual casting.” Cresswell, riding high on the success of *Carnival*, thought none of the actors warranted permanent contracts. Even Sieveking, who wanted a bigger company, thought that “the present company was wrong as to numbers and individuals, and that its quality of acting tended to become worse and worse, and that this was inevitable except in the case of a big company.” King Bull, Sieveking’s colleague in the Programme Research Department,^f “thought that a repertory company made for monotony” because, “whereas on the stage actors could disguise their personality to a very large extent, few microphone actors were versatile enough to overcome the difficulties of disguising the personality conveyed by the voice alone.” Even as early as 1930 King Bull had recognised that the difference between stage and radio acting was more than mere technique: stage acting is about being watched in performance whereas radio acting is whispering in the listener’s ear, a personal interaction.

The Repertory Company would have to go, there was no question. Oddly, Gielgud’s proposal for what should replace it was for a smaller number of “artists of a higher standard” to be hired on three- or four-month contracts. Gielgud seemed to think that actors already making a name on the London stage would be grateful for the opportunity to learn microphone technique. The pragmatic Brown, however, voiced the obvious flaw: that emerging actors “would be unwilling to play anything but leading parts.”^g Nevertheless, “the general opinion of the meeting was that this suggestion of Mr Gielgud’s was an excellent one”, that the contracts of the Repertory members should not be renewed and – ironically, given what was to come after 1939 – “that long contracts will never bring us good artists.”

^f See Chapter 6.

^g Interestingly, Brown also wondered if the leading parts in BBC plays were big enough to satisfy the “small star artist.”

4.3 “Radio drama and how to write it”

Nowhere is the divide between Gielgud and Jeffrey more starkly expressed than in the latter’s brief introduction to the world’s first published manual on the craft of the radio play, Gordon Lea’s *Radio Drama and How to Write It* (1926): “It is my hope that Radio Drama in its *real* form – not a bastard cultivation from the stage – will become a source of inspiration to its heterogeneous broadcast audience.”¹¹ Lea, too, considered radio drama superior to stage plays. “All that is spectacular on the stage, all the pageantry of it, becomes in radio drama actual and real, with not a trace of the artificiality which is inevitable on the stage.”¹²

Lea was a regional broadcaster linked to Station 5NO, Newcastle, where he produced, directed, acted in and wrote plays. He may well have been an amateur linked with the in-house repertory company.^h His book seems to have begun as a guide to writing stage plays which then veered into radio, presumably due to burgeoning interest in the new form. His writing about the stage is workmanlike at best but when he switches to radio his prose comes to life. Lea is a peripheral voice, not a Savoy Hill insider. His ideas are often half-formed, like the medium itself, but his saving grace is his boundless enthusiasm. Lea saw radio as the future of drama whilst for Gielgud it would always be a “Cinderella Medium”:ⁱ

In comparison with the play of the Theatre, with its honourable lineage stretching back to Aeschylus and even beyond ... the Broadcast Play is an infant in arms. Indeed, it is doubtful whether it can be claimed to have had any serious existence at all for more than four years at the outside.

[Gielgud 1932: 12]

The plays that Lea was involved with lasted fifteen or twenty minutes. In 1924 Jeffrey had noted, “At present, the best period of duration for a Radio Play is from fifteen to forty minutes,” and added: “The longer period play would be better to contain some musical effects.”¹³ However by the time Gielgud wrote his six articles on ‘The Wireless Play’ for the *Radio Times*^j full-length original plays were more common and

^h “Among the attractive features recently added by Mr Odhams to the Newcastle programmes are the plays performed at frequent intervals by the newly formed Newcastle Repertory Company.” [Burrows 1924: 153]

ⁱ He first used the term in his 1929 articles for the *Radio Times* – see below.

^j May 24 to June 28 1929.

Gielgud declared the “best practical length for a radio play is an hour and a half.”¹⁴ Unusually, by the time he wrote his first book on radio drama, *How to write Broadcast Plays* (1932), Gielgud had changed his mind. “It is, on the whole, true to say that the ideal length for the Broadcast Play has tended to grow steadily shorter, experience showing that an audience finds listening to the spoken word for more than an hour and a half at the outside too much of a strain.”¹⁵

Regarding content, Lea and Gielgud took opposing views. By 1932 Gielgud was convinced that the future of radio drama lay with dramatised debate. “The play of discussion is probably far nearer to what may be called, for lack of a better expression, ‘pure Radio’, than any play of action can be.” Lea could not disagree more.

When I first produced radio-plays, I started out with the theory that plays which depended mainly on witty dialogue and very little on action would be more intelligible to the listener. Imagine my surprise when I discovered the contrary was the case. By a mistake, the first play I produced for radio was one full of action.^k
[Lea 1926: 57]

Equally, where Gielgud wanted plays with mass appeal, Lea was the first to recognise that radio drama was a mass medium experienced individually.

The radio drama does not make its appeal to a crowd but to an individual. This widens the dramatist’s scope – for what will appeal to a crowd will almost certainly appeal to the individual, but it is by no means certain that what will appeal to the individual will appeal to the crowd.
[Lea 1926: 37]

This was a view echoed by Sieveking who begins *The Stuff of Radio* (1934) with the statement that “In spite of the fact that radio-plays are apparently performed in public, they are not. They are performed in private.” He elaborates: “Radio-drama is in fact such an extraordinarily personal and private matter that it may be difficult to avoid appearing egotistical in writing about it. It is a ‘mystery’ in the old sense; a thing beyond human reason; a kind of secret rite.”¹⁶

^k Beck 2000: 6.4.3 lists a number of plays known to have been produced by Lea before 1926. Judging by the titles, the most likely to be “full of action” is Richard Hughes’ twenty-minute *Congo Night* (23 March 1925).

4.4 Gielgud's early radio plays

No kind of 'secret rite' was ever likely to win favour with the populist Gielgud. In fairness, though, he was always prepared – determined, indeed – to demonstrate his ability to put precepts into practice. *How to write Broadcast Plays* includes the text of three of his earliest and best radio plays, together with Gielgud the producer's critique of their strengths and flaws.

Exiles was written in 1928, before Gielgud's appointment. It is not a great play but it is interestingly epic in scale. It runs for seventy minutes and comprises sixteen short scenes alternating between Paris and Moscow over a fifty-four year period. Sieveking certainly gave it an epic production in February 1930.¹

Eight studios were used; including two echo studios,^m two studios for sound effects and a special gramophone studio, one studio for main cast, a piano and an orchestral combination, one studio for the narrator and announcer, and a final one for a crowd of twenty-five, a chorus and a mouth organist.

[Gielgud 1932: 39]

The transition between Scenes One and Two shows what can be achieved with eight studios. Scene One ends with the mouth organist attempting the Russian national anthem and failing. This fades into a military band playing the anthem properly, then Scene Two begins:

The National Hymn fades into the soft formalism of Mozart's 'Kleine Nachtmusik' played by a string orchestra or quintet. Against it sounds the swish of long silk dresses, the clinking of spurred boots, and a murmur of conversation. The music should swell and die so as to break up the dialogue.

[Gielgud 1932: 50-51]

In fact, *Exiles* is Gielgud's Dramatic Control Panel play. He criticises it as such in his "Comments": "It deliberately fits its story to an unnecessary elaboration of machinery. It cries out for simplification."¹⁷ Nevertheless, in 1930 only one other radio dramatist – Berkeley – had attempted a European play on such a scale.

¹ February 27 1930 (Daventry) and February 28 1930 (London).

^m Gielgud explains a secondary use for the echo room: "[The Producer] can change his scene in time by adding echo to a scene which has previously been played, thereby giving it a curiously unreal effect, immediately apparent as the equivalent of the film 'flash-back'" [Gielgud 1932: 186].

Similarly, *Friday Morning*ⁿ has echoes of Lewis's *Pursuit* and Jeffrey's *Speed*. Like them, *Friday Morning* is a thriller, almost a prototype of *Airport* disaster movies. The significance of the piece, however, lies with Gielgud's startling use of interior monologue. Various couples board the 8.30am flight from Croydon to Paris – clearly a tremendous 'hook' for listeners, very few of whom would have flown. When the engine fails over the Channel Gielgud switches to interior monologue as each passenger reflects on life and death. His sole stage direction (he was his own producer) reads, "*Change of voice perspective*".¹⁸

...from the strictly artistic point of view, it is dubious whether the introduction of mental soliloquies can be justified. The mental soliloquy is not, of course, an original factor in a Broadcast Play. It has been used before, and will no doubt be used again. It is a very simple way out of a dilemma, and an almost invariably effective one, so long as the producer remembers that in order to achieve his effect he must make a radical variation in sound perspective between the mental soliloquy and his normal dialogue. From the purely artistic point of view it is probable that the device savours too much of a 'stunt' to be quite beyond reproach. [Gielgud 1932: 184-185]

Red Tabs^o is the play with which Gielgud believed he had pioneered a new radiogenic form. The debate play is different to the play of ideas; in *Path of Glory* Peach dramatised his hypothesis whereas in *Red Tabs* Gielgud frames the argument in a dramatic setting. Others attempted the form, notably Eric Linklater,^p but debate plays never became standard because the loss of narrative, action and to a great extent character is only tolerable if the debate centres on the biggest issues.

Gielgud's topic is certainly big enough: Is it the soldier's duty to obey crazy and potentially lethal orders? The resonance for listeners in 1930 was obvious given the massive loss of life on the fields of Flanders in World War I. The twist, however, is that *Red Tabs* is set in World War II, 1936-1939.

Gielgud bolsters the debate with some battlefront scenes and sound effects but he is right in his "Comments": "it is obvious that it comes to grief in so far that it remorselessly sacrifices its characterization to the demands of its central theme. The

ⁿ February 4 1932 (National) and February 6 1932 (London Regional).

^o October 1 1930 (London Regional) and October 2 1930 (National).

^p See Chapter 7.

debaters are too obviously types; in their speeches they reveal themselves too blatantly as mouth-pieces.”¹⁹ What the play cries out for is, of course, the man who says no.

4.5 The single play: Hamilton and Wade

The BBC Year Book for 1933 includes a list of “the most important plays broadcast during the past year,” reproduced as Appendix 1. This should not be mistaken for the whole of Drama Department output during 1932 – there was also a festival of radio plays to mark the 10th anniversary of the BBC⁹ – but it demonstrates the virtual parity of what had by then become the three elements of broadcast drama, original “microphone plays”, adaptations and dramatisations.

In the second volume of his *History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* Briggs provides tables which categorise and compare the output of the BBC through the 1930s. Drama had only comprised 0.63% of 77.5 hours broadcasting in one week in October 1928 and 2.53% in same week of 1929 but by 1930 it occupied 1.49% of National Programming and 3.05% of 68 hours composite regional programming.²⁰ Demand was therefore small but increasing. By 1934 drama was 3% of the total output.²¹ By that same week in 1938 the National Programme was broadcasting 96 hours a week, the Regional Programmes 91 hours, yet drama still only contributed 3.03% and 1.65% respectively.²² Thus whilst the share of broadcasting time allotted to drama remained exactly the same, the proliferation of dramatisations, adaptations and – towards the end of the decade – the arrival of serials inevitably meant fewer original plays. That said, single plays continued to be produced throughout the 1930s with the same range of quality broadcast plays always have, from the forgettable to the substantial. That range can perhaps best be illustrated by the work of two of the better known radio playwrights of the decade, both of whom featured in the 1932 list of ‘important’ plays: Patrick

⁹ This included landmark original dramas like *Danger*, *The White Chateau*, *The First Kaleidoscope*, *The Flowers are not for You to Pick*, *The Path of Glory*, *Pursuit* and *Red Tabs*, plus three plays whose significance has not survived: *The Wrong Bus* (Martin Husingtree), *Matinée* (P H Lennox) and *Obsession* (Dulcima Glasby). The festival also included revivals of the dramatisations of Compton Mackenzie’s *Carnival*, Conrad’s *Romance* and a new version of *The Three Musketeers* by Guthrie and Patrick Riddell, billed in *The Times* as “the first time that a play has been broadcast in serial form.” (*The Times*, “Tenth Anniversary of the BBC”, Wednesday, November 9 1932)

Hamilton, already a literary lion when he came to radio, and Philip Wade, a BBC man through and through.

In his foreword to the published version of Hamilton's two radio plays Gielgud recalls his production of *Rope* (1932), "which achieved definite success in spite of a fantastic outcry in certain Press quarters..."²³ The outcry was the same that greeted the 1929 stage production; although Hamilton always denied it, the play was clearly based on the notorious Leopold and Loeb murder case of 1924. The outcry doubtless increased the radio audience and encouraged Gielgud to commission more.

In 1932 Hamilton was a star of contemporary British letters. He had published his first novel at the age of twenty and his fourth, *The Midnight Bell*,¹ appeared a month after *Rope* in 1929. Gielgud describes Hamilton as a playwright for whom "the size of the radio audience to some extent compensates for the absence of weekly royalties."²⁴ That might have been the case with the radio adaptation of *Rope* but by 1937 and *Money With Menaces* Hamilton was looking to prove he could still write plays.

In 1932 Hamilton was the victim of a hit and run accident. His injuries were so severe that he was unable to write for two years. He completed his London trilogy with *The Plains of Cement* in 1934 and then completed nothing until *Money With Menaces*, produced by Sieveking and premiered on January 4 1937.

Like *Rope*, *Money With Menaces* is a crime thriller. "Mr Poland" rings up newspaper magnate Carruthers and tells him he has kidnapped his daughter. "You thought, did you not, that this was the sort of thing which only happened to the children of rich American gentlemen. Well, you're wrong."²⁵ It is not a great play, extraordinarily wordy⁵ and with almost half of the 'action' happening over the telephone. In fact, "Poland" only exists on the phone. He finally reveals he is actually Stevens, "a dirty little funk" who Carruthers bullied at public school.²⁶ Jennifer was never abducted; she is at a friend's party. All Stevens wanted was to give Carruthers a taste of the torture he dealt out as a boy. As is so often the case with thrillers, the twist does not withstand scrutiny. In a play largely conducted on the telephone Carruthers could surely have rung the woman hosting the party, as he does after the reveal, and asked to speak to his daughter.

¹ The first part of his London trilogy *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky*.

⁵ "Poland" has a three-minute speech as early as page 11 of the play.

Hamilton's second original radio play, *To the Public Danger*,¹ is everything *Money With Menaces* is not – full of incident, dialogue, and an ending not so much surprising as suspenseful. Gielgud called it: "One of the best and most successful broadcast plays ever written."²⁷ There is a crime at the heart of *To the Public Danger* but it is not a play about crime. It is a play about the dangers of drink driving, a subject clearly close to Hamilton who was both a notorious drinker and at the time probably the best-known British victim of a hit and run.

The setting is unusual – a roadhouse, "standing back from a big arterial road somewhere on the border-regions of Buckingham and Oxford"²⁸ – and the play opens with what is surely the first occurrence of a pinball machine in British broadcast drama. Two middleaged soaks, Cole and Reggie, fall in with local youngsters Fred and Nan. After several whiskies they all pile into Cole's car. Swigging from a hip flask as he drives, Cole hits what they think is a man on a bicycle and drives on. Fred is the only one who cares. He wants to go back or call the emergency services. Nan is too taken with the dashing Cole and Reggie is sleeping it off on the back seat. They dump Fred by the roadside and drive away. Inevitably, the car crashes and everyone in it is killed. The slightly disappointing twist is revealed at the inquest. There was no man on a bicycle – what Cole drove into was in fact two bikes with sacks of potatoes on them propped against a wall. Hamilton undermines his point – that drunk drivers are a danger to others, not just themselves. He attempts a recovery in a three-page speech by the coroner but the effect is more sermon than summing-up.

Philip Wade had small parts in both Hamilton plays and all three plays in Gielgud's 1932 collection. He was, indeed, the most ubiquitous of radio actors in the 1920s and 1930s, a repertory stalwart before the BBC officially had a repertory company. His *Wedding Group and other Plays* (1936) showcases his best-known play, a film of which was made in the year of publication. With Hamilton the listener is drawn into the author's unsettling private world; with Wade, however, we enter the world of the radio play as it continues today on BBC Radio 4.

¹ February 25 1939.

Wedding Group^u seems more substantial than it actually is. On the eve of her daughter's wedding Mrs Wilde gets out the family photograph album. The album falls open at a Victorian wedding group. A skirl of the bagpipes and we flash back to Edinburgh 1849. Wade shows his lack of artistry with clumsy exposition; young Robert harangues friends who already know with "Let me tell you more about myself. My father is trying to be a country squire in Wiltshire; living ostentatiously on money made by sweating labourers in Lancashire."²⁹ Janet is keen on Robert but Robert has been courting Janet's sister Margaret, so Janet joins Florence Nightingale on her mission to the Crimea. She returns when Robert declares his love in a letter. They marry in 1860, hence the wedding group, and to no one's surprise Janet is Mrs Wilde's great aunt.

Wade is the least able of the dramatists discussed thus far yet he has to be considered because, as Gielgud says in his introduction, "These plays have been among the most successful of original radio plays broadcast during the last year or two."³⁰ Equally, Wade is important because he, to a greater extent than any more talented predecessor, defined the durable dramatic radio form. *Wedding Group*, with its nostalgic recall of a love story from the past, could be any *Afternoon Play* seventy years later.

4.6 Conclusions

Where R E Jeffrey and Gordon Lea foresaw radio drama supplanting the stage, Val Gielgud came from a stage background. He made his name with the radio adaptation of *Saint Joan* and thereafter envisaged the two forms coming closer together with the BBC broadcasting those commercial metropolitan stage dramas with the broadest appeal and commissioning original radio plays from the same established West End playwrights.

Patrick Hamilton fitted perfectly within those parameters: his stage hit *Rope* proved equally successful when adapted for radio and led to commissions for two original scripts, the now forgotten *To the Public Danger* and *Money with Menaces*, revived as recently as 2004.^v It was the in-house talent of Philip Wade, however, that developed

^u May 28 1935.

^v Radio 4, *Afternoon Play*, May 28 2004, repeated March 2 2006.

the sentimental, often nostalgic drama that predominates in Radio 4's *Afternoon Play* slot today.

The list of notable stage adaptations of 1932 in Appendix 1 – specifically the blend of classic and contemporary plays – could equally be the schedule of *Drama on 3* in 2006. Gielgud's other contribution to broadcast dramatic literature, the dramatised novel, is considered in the next chapter.

References

- ¹ Gielgud 1957: 35
- ² Conolly, "GBS & the BBC: Saint Joan, 1929" p.12
- ³ *Ibid*, p.14
- ⁴ *The Times*, Thursday, April 25 1929, p. 10
- ⁵ *The Times*, Friday, April 26 1929, p. 10
- ⁶ *The Times*, Saturday, April 27 1929, p. 4
- ⁷ Conolly, p.23
- ⁸ WAC R19/281 Drama Repertory Company 1929-1937
- ⁹ Letter, Graves to Production Executive, August 6 1930 (WAC R19/281)
- ¹⁰ Internal Circulating Memo, "Repertory Company", August 7 1930 (WAC R19/281)
- ¹¹ Lea 1926: 12
- ¹² Lea 1926: 36
- ¹³ Jeffrey, *Notes on Technique of Playwriting for Wireless Broadcast* (1924), (WAC R19/276) Entertainment, Drama Department 1924-1948.
- ¹⁴ Crook (2001), *Val Gielgud and the BBC*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/1/1/2001/01/010401_gielgud.shtml
- ¹⁵ Gielgud 1932: 17
- ¹⁶ Sieveking 1934: 15
- ¹⁷ Gielgud 1932: 98
- ¹⁸ Gielgud 1932: 176
- ¹⁹ Gielgud 1932: 146
- ²⁰ Briggs 1965: 35
- ²¹ Briggs 1965: 51
- ²² Briggs 1965: 54
- ²³ Hamilton 1939: v
- ²⁴ *Ibid*
- ²⁵ Hamilton 1939: 19
- ²⁶ Hamilton 1939: 40
- ²⁷ Gielgud 1947: 88
- ²⁸ Hamilton 1939: 49
- ²⁹ Wade 1936: 25
- ³⁰ Wade 1936: 11

Chapter 5: The diversification of dramatic forms

5.1 Introduction

As Gielgud's personal triumph with *Saint Joan* left him permanently convinced of the importance of adapted stage plays for radio, so the great success of his close friend Eric Maschwitz with the dramatisation of Compton Mackenzie's novel *Carnival* led Gielgud to encourage a proliferation of dramatisations.

Gordon Lea described what may well have been the BBC's first attempt at dramatisation, *Three scenes from "Under Two Flags"* (1925), and comparison with descriptions of *Carnival* demonstrates how sophisticated broadcast technique had become in only four years.

The diversification of British radio drama into three broadly equal components was not echoed in other countries. In 1931 Gielgud visited Weimar Germany where the original single play or *hörspiel* remained the prestige product and where Rudolf Arnheim would lay the foundations of a critical theory with his *Radio: An Art of Sound* (1936). In America dramatic serials dominated the airwaves. By the time Gielgud visited the States in 1938, however, the commercial networks had increased the cultural quality of their output under pressure from their regulators. By 1938, indeed, *CBS Workshop* was producing plays that were more advanced than the BBC Drama Department product in terms of quality, ambition and content.

The staple of the *CBS Workshop* was nevertheless dramatisation, including the most famous dramatisation of all, the Mercury Theatre's *War of the Worlds* (1938), the case study in this chapter.

5.2 Dramatisation

Lea describes what may well have been the first attempt to make a radio drama from a novel. *Three Episodes from 'Under Two Flags'*, radio version by S G Jones, was a

twenty-minute presentation from Newcastle 5NO on October 7 1925, performed by the Newcastle Repertory Company.¹ Beck has identified an earlier production of *Under Two Flags* from Birmingham 5IT (June 27 1924)² but this is clearly not the version described by Lea and may have been an adaptation of a stage dramatisation. There was certainly a stage version playing in London in 1926 when Amyas Young's entertainment "founded upon" Ouida was broadcast from 2LO.³

Foreign Legion stories were popular in the 1920s and Ouida's 1867 romance of "Victor", (secretly Bertie Cecil of His Majesty's 1st Life Guards), and "that brilliant little *vivandière*" Cigarette,⁴ had the additional advantage of being recently out of copyright.

In essence, what Jones did was synopsis action and description – "Then swiftly as a swallow darts, she quitted him, and flew on her headlong way"⁵ – and let the actors act out the dialogue. Even in Lea's extract there are pages of narration and scarcely any dialogue. Lea, having nothing to compare it with, concludes that the technique was a success: "This was a specially prepared version which proved very effective as a radio play. It embodies partly the form of the novel or story, the more dramatic portions of which take unto themselves independent life and become plays."⁶ In retrospect, it was clearly more enactment than dramatisation, requiring little of its dramatist beyond basic editing skills. The dramatisation that found creative, radiophonic solutions to the problem of turning descriptive and discursive prose into a major radio play was broadcast barely a week into Gielgud's tenure, on January 8 1929.

There is the case, almost legendary in broadcasting history, of Mr Holt Marvell's adaptation of Mr Compton Mackenzie's novel, *Carnival*. ... This was indeed 'a wedding of true minds' brought about largely by the extreme and almost burning enthusiasm for the original work which had flamed in Mr Marvell's breast for a number of years. [Gielgud 1948: 57-58]

'Holt Marvell' was, of course, Gielgud's friend, collaborator and former editor at the *Radio Times*, Eric Maschwitz.

The attractions of Mackenzie's 1912 novel have not survived and it is hard to share Maschwitz's passion. As Crook puts it, "The fact of the matter is that *Carnival* did not endure as a key text of Compton Mackenzie's literary output."⁷ At the time, however,

the book was both successful and slightly salacious. Islington-born Jenny becomes a dancer at Covent Garden, poses for her artist-lover, has sex with a man she has just met and enters into a marriage of convenience with someone else entirely.

The radio version was a significant undertaking for the fledgling Drama Department, a live broadcast of more than 100 scenes, lasting two hours and occupying every studio at Savoy Hill. The costs of the original production have not been traced but those of the 1933 revival were as follows:^a

Cast over Fifty guineas	None
Cast under Fifty guineas (20)	£170
Gersham Parkington Quintet	£35
Augmentation of Theatre Orchestra by two players	£7 10 0
Revue Chorus	£20
Copyright	Nil
	£232.10.0
Amount budgeted	£300

Description was such a feature of the novel that Maschwitz could not bring himself to dispense with a narrator. His solution was to persuade Mackenzie to narrate it himself, and to engage the author with the action of his novel by adding a new prologue, set in the war-torn Balkans of 1915 in which Michael Fane (Mackenzie) remembers Jenny Pearl.⁸ There is no Fane in the novel, which, although vague on dates, is thoroughly Edwardian in setting and ends *circa* 1911-12 when Mackenzie was writing it. Self-evidently, Mackenzie was happy to have his best seller added to, perhaps because, as Gielgud revealed, “the reputed original of Jenny Pearl sat beside him at the Narrator’s desk.”⁹

Part of the dramatisation’s success can be attributed to producer Peter Creswell’s mastery of the Dramatic Control Panel:

If the production of *The First Kaleidoscope* was the proving of the Dramatic Control Panel, the production of *Carnival* was certainly its justification. Its opening sequence – the narrator’s voice fading into the background of the Islington mean street, with its trams, the screaming of children, and the barrel-organ – Madame Aldavini’s dancing-class, the Glasgow pantomime, the Eton Boating Song flashbacks, the love scenes in the hansom cab ... all these things

^a Finance, Drama, File 1A 1933-1934 (WAC R20/51/1)

were welded into a pattern which in spite of its complexity and colour was yet essentially 'easy on the ear'.
[Gielgud 1947: 92]

Equally the dramatisation, like the book, was titillating for its time. "As long ago as 1929," Gielgud wrote, two decades later, "a childbirth sequence was brought to the microphone in the adaptation of Compton Mackenzie's novel, *Carnival*..."¹⁰

5.3 German *Hörspiel*

In 1932 Gielgud was still convinced that the Dramatic Control Panel and consequent multi-studio method was what made BBC radio drama superior to other models elsewhere in the world.

Although this device is not unknown in the United States, or in Germany, its use has not yet been adopted in either of these countries. Even in the great new broadcasting building in Berlin, which is in many ways a model of up to date equipment, Broadcast Plays are still handled from single large studios, which are sub-divided by means of curtains or folding-doors, and which contain several different microphones for the use of different members of the cast, effects, music, and so forth.
[Gielgud 1932: 22]

Gielgud had already visited Germany, in 1931, and would spend time in America in 1938. He clearly saw German and American broadcasters as his closest competitors, which prompts the question how, if at all, radio drama had developed or diversified in those countries by the end of radio's second decade.

Significantly, German radio drama had not diversified away from the original radio play pioneered by Flesch in 1924. Initially, there had been the same inclination to adapt stage plays but in Germany this had always been seen as a stopgap, developing and sustaining an audience for broadcast drama until a truly radiogenic form – the *Hörspiel* or 'ear-play' – could be refined. Mark Cory describes the transition:

Many writers saw more potential for a unique creative experience in the *Hörspiel* and were unwilling to limit it to a mere reworking of material from other genres. Creative radio, it was felt, had to offer something better than an acoustical approximation of theatrical effects. The potential of the new medium

could never be tapped as long as the main effort was spent on compensating for a handicap.
[Cory 1974: 12]

In the fully-fledged *Hörspiel*, “Action was internalised, realistic physical dimensions suspended, and time telescoped – all in the interests of a new artistic, symbolic, and increasingly lyric (as opposed to dramatic) effects.”¹¹ Elsewhere, Cory cites an early *Hörspiel* which Gielgud witnessed in production at the Berlin Rundfunkhaus on July 16 1931:

Struggling to create a drama about the rescue attempts surrounding the crash of the airship *Italia* as it attempted a flight over the North Pole in 1928, Friedrich Wolf drew upon the ancient dramatic device of the messenger, now brought up-to-date with radio. Wolf’s *SOS Rao-Rao-Foyn/Krassin rettet Italia* imitated a live broadcast of a rescue attempt by the crew of the *Krassin*, as reported over radio.¹²

Gielgud considered the production “capital and most interesting” and notes in parentheses that an English version was banned “as a result of a debate in the House of Lords!”¹³

Cory identifies a strand of reported disaster dramas in Germany between 1929 and 1935. These include *Magnet-Pol* by Arno Shirokauer, *Station D im Eismeer* by Hans Braun, *Polarkantate* by Hermann W Anders and “the most popular *Hörspiel* of Weimar Germany” Ernst Johannsen’s *Brigade Exchange*.¹⁴ The latter had already aired in Britain as part of the build-up to Armistice Day 1930, translated by I D Benzie and Dulcima Glasby and produced by Howard Rose.¹⁵

Johannsen calls his play “A Telephone Story of the Great War”, a subtitle that describes it precisely. Shneider doggedly mans his field telephone exchange while reports come in from all over the battlefield. The bombs and bullets come ever closer – with the inevitable conclusion. In its way Johannsen’s *Hörspiel* was as influential as Hughes’s *Danger*. NBC broadcast it in America in 1932 in four languages “including the French”¹⁶ and the British production led to a sub-genre of telephone plays including *Money With Menaces* and the hugely popular *Weakness of Frau Borkhardt*.^b

^b See Chapter 7.

Although Gielgud considered the single studio method less advanced than the British system, in one key aspect German radio technology was ahead of the British. By 1930 they were recording radio plays rather than broadcasting live. Wire recording and recording on wax did not allow editing but did permit retakes. Walter Ruttmann presaged the future of editing by recording *Weekend* (1930), a freeform soundscape of Berlin, on film soundtrack and Friedrich Walter Bischoff used the same technology – the “Tri-Ergon process”¹⁷ – to create his sound symphony *Hello! You’re Tuned to Radio Earth!* Both were commissioned by Flesch for the Berlin Radio Hour and prefigured German radio’s unique contribution to postwar radio drama, the New *Hörspiel*.^c

5.4 “An Art of Sound”

Experiments like *Weekend* and *Radio Earth* were considerable influences on the thinking of the first great theorist of radio. Rudolf Arnheim was a psychologist and art theorist who fled Hitler’s Germany in 1934 and ultimately found refuge in America. He wrote *Radio: An Art of Sound* (1936) in German in Rome and London as a continuation of the theories developed in his *Film As Art* (1932).

Perhaps because he was perforce an internationalist Arnheim argues for a radio drama that goes beyond mere recitation. Most notably, he argues that the sound of speech has greater emotional impact than the words.

But this does not mean that in radio drama ... the subject matter is of no consequence – most certainly not. But it should be realised that the elemental force lies in the sound, which affects everyone more directly than the meaning of the word, and all radio art must make this fact its starting-point... The words of a radio play should not go about in acoustic hair-shirts, they should shimmer in all their tone-colours, for the way to meaning of the word lies through the ear.

[Arnheim 1936: 28-29]

He envisages radio drama in operatic form: bass, contralto, tenor, and “the counterplay of alternating voices”.¹⁸ Chiefly, though, he advocates radio-film.

^c See Chapter 13.

It would be a step of great importance for the development of the art of radio drama, if every radio play which used space and montage as a means of expression were not ‘performed’ in the studio as if on the stage, but were recorded piecemeal on film-strips like a sound-film, and the individual strips cut properly afterwards and mounted as a sound-film. ... This would be superfluous in plays depending entirely on words, plays in which there was absolutely no question of the voices sounding in materialised space nor of scenic indication by sounds, nor of rapid changes of scene. But it is correspondingly more important for filmic wireless plays. [Arnheim 1936: 126]

Arnheim is clearly referencing *Weekend* here. Although when speaking of broadcasting as it stood in 1936 he rightly seeks a middle ground between “highly complicated works of art which make the average man despair” and “‘popular’ entertainment ... so inferior that it turns the stomach of educated people”,¹⁹ Arnheim sees no future for the ‘standard’ radio play. In his view, radio drama will become the province of the avant-garde because middlebrow drama and stage adaptations will migrate to television. In terms of German postwar broadcasting he was right.^d

5.5 American network radio drama

The Nazis drove Arnheim into exile and even in 1931 Gielgud had sensed the approaching clampdown on modernism. In Berlin he met and liked Hans Flesch but took against Flesch’s Assistant Controller, Pfeil, “who made no secret of being a Nazi.”²⁰

We saw too much of him, and too little of Flesch. But I got the impression that the former was almost as much an official escort as a host – and that the latter’s position was inclined to be shaky. [Gielgud 1947:118]

Over the next few years fascism would stifle artistic development across mainland Europe with radio drama no exception. The BBC would remain shamefully silent until after the declaration of war. Ironically the only broadcasting system where overt anti-fascism flourished before 1939 was the commercial American system.

^d See Chapter 13.

American radio drama developed hardly at all between *The Wolf* in 1922 and the formation of the first national network by the Radio Corporation of America in November 1926. RCA's National Broadcasting Company actually operated two networks, NBC Red and NBC Blue, with much of the early programming coming from two different New York stations, WEAf (Red) and WJZ (Blue).²¹ The Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) launched in September 1927 from New York station WABC, and in September 1934 the Mutual Broadcasting System became the third national network, mainly to broadcast *The Lone Ranger* which had begun on the local Detroit station WXYZ. Mutual was very much the poor relation of NBC and CBS. Far from owning its own radio station, the network itself was soon acquired by New York station WOR.

Three networks broadcasting morning, noon and night meant there was a vast amount of airtime to fill. Controllers could mount a serious drama or a variety show in the evening, when people had time to sit down and listen, but the daytime audience was much more diverse – people working, people at home, people working at home. Such an amorphous demographic was impossible to satisfy, so the broadcasters, supported by their commercial sponsors, simply made one up.⁶ From roughly 1930 US daytime programming was aimed solely at comfortably off, stay-at-home women under forty – irrespective of the fact that in the real world the Great Depression was raging. It might even be said that daytime drama became a phenomenon precisely because it offered an idealised image of American prosperity that its listeners could only dream of. All across the continent mothers wondering where the next meal was coming from listened to fictional mothers on the radio wondering if their daughter's latest beau was The One.

NBC had offered short daily dramas almost from the beginning. Their flagship programme since 1929 had been *Amos 'n' Andy*, broadcast every weekday at 7.00pm, featuring the blackface comedians Correll and Gosden, who by 1933 were earning \$100,000 a year.²² A similar offering was *Clara, Lu 'n' Em* (1931), three women chatting over the latest happenings in their neighbourhood. These programmes were sponsored by commercial companies but created by the network whereas soap opera was created by advertising agencies on behalf of their clients. The winning formula was

⁶ See Douglas 1999: 124-160 for a detailed and considered discussion of "The Invention of the Audience" in the American context.

devised by Frank Hummert of Chicago's Blackett-Sample-Hummert agency and Anne Ashenhurst, who had previously written radio continuity. Their first open-ended daily drama was *Betty and Bob* (1932), starring Don Ameche. The concept was so successful – and relatively easy to emulate – that by 1933 *Betty and Bob* had a rival, also on NBC, in *Today's Children* by Irna Phillips.²³ A new dramatic form had been invented and the demand for it was insatiable. Over the next twenty years the Hummerts (Frank and Anne married in 1935) created something like 125 serials, many of which ran every weekday for decades.

Apart from series and serials, the networks' main dramatic offerings were adaptations from other forms or, occasionally, borrowings from other broadcasters such as *Brigade Exchange*. What the networks and their sponsors most favoured were anthologies – *The Eveready Hour*, *The House of Firestone*, and Vernon Radcliffe's *Radio Guild* – which looked cohesive but which were really series of one-off adaptations. In 1934 the J Walter Thompson advertising agency created *The Lux Radio Hour* for CBS. Originally one-hour adaptations of popular Broadway plays broadcast from New York, the series only really came into its own when it moved to Hollywood in 1936 and began adapting movie screenplays with Cecil B DeMille as host.²⁴ CBS also broadcast a series of original single plays based on American history called *Roses and Drums* (1933) whilst NBC's *The Empire Builders* (1929-31) was a series of half-hour weekly adventures loosely linked by the route, from Chicago to Seattle, of sponsor the Great Northern Railroad's eponymous train.²⁵ By 1931, with radio sets in 20% of American households, US radio advertising was worth \$31 million a year.²⁶ NBC had doubled its radio drama output to ten hours a week, and *The Empire Builders* was the network's most expensive original drama series, costing the GNR \$2000 a week.²⁷

From the earliest days of broadcasting influential groups had been advocating a separate non-commercial service as a freedom of speech issue.²⁸ Unable to achieve consensus, the proponents of public service broadcasting were out-lobbied by the networks in the lead-up to the 1934 Communications Act, which replaced the Federal Radio Commission with a Federal Communications Commission.^f The FCC initially proved as toothless as its precursor, holding hearings at which NBC successfully argued

^f See Engelman 1996 Chapter 3: "Defeat of the 1930s Broadcast Reform Movement", pp. 26-40.

that *Amos 'n' Andy* was a contribution to cultural development. In fact, the first wave of daily serials was already in terminal decline:

...in 1931 *Amos 'n' Andy* peaked and began losing listeners. And as they ceased tuning in the program, millions of people stopped listening to all radio programs. This was especially the case among middle and upper-middle class set owners who tired of the program after two years. With the decline of *Amos 'n' Andy*, radio figures collapsed. Whereas in 1930 about 74 percent of all set owners used their sets on an average evening, by August 1933, the total had dropped to 55.5 percent. Within two years the decline of *Amos 'n' Andy* had taken with it almost one-quarter of all radio users. [MacDonald 1979: 29]

The networks tried everything to recapture the listeners' interest. They launched series after series in search of a hit and, in deference to their critics, increased cultural programming. RCA initially took the classical music route, putting Toscanini in charge of the new NBC orchestra, whilst CBS cultivated a reputation for literary drama.²⁹

Columbia Workshop was the brainchild of producer Irving Reis who had visited Europe and been impressed by European radio drama. In scheduling terms it was a direct replacement for *Roses and Drums*. Its first broadcast on Sunday July 18 1936 was the first original radio play, Richard Hughes's *Comedy of Danger*.³⁰ On April 11 1937 serious American radio drama found a voice of its own with Archibald MacLeish's anti-fascist verse-play *The Fall of the City*.

MacLeish's message is blunt – could scarcely be blunter – but what remains surprising about the play today is its largely successful marriage of contemporary news technique with elements of the most ancient Greek tragedies. He begins with the Voice of the Studio Director, “orotund and professional”:

Ladies and gentlemen:
This broadcast comes to you from the city... [MacLeish 1937: 11]

We are told that the reason the world is interested in the city is that for the last three days a dead woman has risen daily from her tomb. This is the world of the ancient Greeks, reminiscent of the ghosts of Hector and Achilles in the Trojan plays. The parallel is compounded when we cut to the Voice of the Announcer, on the crowded central plaza as for the first time the dead woman speaks. She delivers a prophecy:

The city of masterless men
Will take a master.
There will be shouting then:
Blood after.

[MacLeish 1937: 15]

Even she does not know what this means. In traditional Greek manner a messenger arrives: “There has come the conqueror.”³¹ The citizens are unsettled until an orator roundly dismisses the threat. “Scorn conquerors,” he tells them.³² The way to deal with danger is to ignore it. The folly of such a stance is quickly revealed – too quickly, it has to be said, for *Columbia Workshop* plays lasted thirty minutes at most.⁸

Fink calls *The Fall of the City* “a long narrative poem with voices.”³³ Its dramatic impact is diminished by the lack of characters with whom the listener can empathise. MacLeish intensifies the abstraction of his *dramatis personae* by calling them ‘The Voice of the Dead Woman’, ‘The Voice of the General’, and so on. This is because he sees radio as the medium of the poet. On radio, he says, “There is only the spoken word – an implement which poets have always claimed to use with special authority. There is only the word-excited imagination – a theatre in which poets have always claimed peculiar rights to play.”³⁴

Even so, *The Fall of the City* was a brave choice for a commercial network. Europe’s shift to the far right was of no real concern to the majority of Americans in 1937 yet MacLeish was the first in a line of US writers and producers who openly disdained neutrality, albeit only on non-sponsored, “sustaining” programmes like the *Columbia Workshop*.³⁵ MacLeish’s second play for the *Workshop* was *Air Raid*,^h again using the framing device of the Studio Director keeping an apparently expectant audience appraised of the outcome of the “ultimatum”. *Air Raid* is the more effective play because the target is specific. MacLeish keeps the setting allegorical but all his listeners knew he was dramatising the raid on Guernica.

Gielgud generally scorns American radio drama but acknowledges that *Columbia Workshop* was the ‘inspiration’ behind the BBC *Experimental Hour*³⁶ launched on October 7 1937 with Peter Creswell’s production of *The Fall of the City*, described by

⁸ Many, including the first, were double bills.

^h October 27 1938.

the *Times* as “an experiment in verse”³⁷ but in fact an echo of what the BBC in Manchester had been producing for more than a year.^l

5.6 Case study: “The War of the Worlds” (1938)

Guernica became the yardstick by which left-leaning US radio writers established their *bona fides*. Norman Corwin’s *They Fly Through the Air with the Greatest of Ease* (February 1939) was a Guernica play, with bomber crews so dissociated from their actions that they enjoy the patterns made by the fleeing citizens below, and ‘destruction from the skies’ drives Welles and Koch’s *War of the Worlds*, aired only three days after *Air Raid*.

The Mercury Theatre of the Air had been running on CBS Sunday evenings for sixteen weeks without causing any sort of scandal. If anything, the programme to date had been disappointingly staid. *Dracula* opened the series on July 11 1938 and was followed by *Treasure Island*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

It is not clear who thought of taking a radically different approach to H G Well’s 1898 thriller; five decades of failure after *Citizen Kane* left Welles a notoriously unreliable witness, and bitter disputes over the authorship of *Kane* made Howard Koch equally unreliable on the subject of Welles. Listening to the play again³⁸ reveals two distinct hands at work, one responsible for the ‘reportage’ style of Act One, the other for the monologue narration of Act Two. Overlong narration was Welles’s stock-in-trade^j but then so was news-style ‘reportage’ – Welles played the narrator in *The Fall of the City* and used the device in his 1938 anti-fascist take on *Julius Caesar*.^k On balance, it seems likely that Koch wrote the parts that panicked the nation whilst Welles wrote the beginning and the end.

Welles’s opening monologue is a close match to the opening sentences of the novel. “No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man’s and yet as

^l See Chapter 6.

^j See, for example, his *Columbus Day* (1942) in Barnouw 1945.

^k See Judith E Smith, “Radio’s ‘Cultural Front’, 1938-1948”, in Hilmes and Loviglio 2002: 214

mortal as his own”³⁹, becomes “We know now that in the early years of the twentieth century this world was being watched closely by intelligences greater than man’s and yet as mortal as his own.”⁴⁰ Welles’s dramatisations always revered their source. Describing Welles’s various adaptations of *Heart of Darkness*, the first of which was the Mercury Theatre’s broadcast the week after *War of the Worlds*. Ted Billy speaks of “his reverence for Conrad’s language”.⁴¹

The end of the monologue marks the divergence from the source text. In 1898 H G Wells was writing about the events of 1894. The voice of Orson Welles, on the other hand, brings the narrative literally up to the minute.

It was near the end of October. Business was better. The war scare was over. More men were back at work. Sales were picking up. On this particular evening, October 30th, the Crossley service estimated that thirty-two million people were listening in on radios.

Then, almost as if the tuning has slipped – as often happened on the crowded American airwaves – what sounds like the real weather forecast is faded in. “This weather report comes to you from the Government Weather Bureau.” The announcer returns us to our normal programming, “to the Meridian Room in the Hotel Park Plaza in downtown New York” and the music of Ramón Raquello and his orchestra.

The programme is interrupted, as programmes were always being interrupted during the summer and early autumn of 1938.

At twenty minutes before eight, Central Time, Professor Farrell of the Mount Jennings Observatory, Chicago, Illinois, reports observing several explosions of incandescent gas, occurring at regular intervals on the planet Mars.

H G Wells used real locations to intensify the reader’s terror – Woking, Mortlake, Weybridge and Central London; Welles and Koch Americanise the device

It is reported that at 8.50pm a huge, flaming object, believed to be a meteorite, fell on a farm in the neighbourhood of Grover’s Mill, New Jersey, twenty-two miles from Trenton.

Trenton is obviously a real place; Grover’s Mill is not, a change demanded by CBS who did not wish to frighten their audience.⁴² The use of Trenton is consciously

evocative: it was at Trenton that the *Hindenberg* burnt in May 1937 and radio listeners for the first time heard live coverage of death and destruction.⁴³

Wells's narrator-hero remains nameless; he is Everyman, happily married and living in suburbia. Orson Welles, however, cannot resist giving himself the star part. As Professor Richard Pierson "of the observatory at Princeton" he gives us all the scientific exposition we need: "The metal casing is definitely extraterrestrial ... not found on this earth." By the second half of the play, however, Pierson has become the rootless wanderer of Wells's Book Two. "As I set down these notes on paper, I'm obsessed by the thought that I may be the last living man on Earth." Like Wells's narrator he wanders the deserted streets of his capital city. Like Wells's narrator Pierson ends up telling us in clumsy exposition what ultimately defeated the Martians.

Later when their bodies were examined in the laboratories, it was found that they were killed by the putrefactive and disease bacteria against which their systems were unprepared... slain, after all man's defences had failed, by the humblest thing that God in His wisdom has put upon this earth.

The dramatisation, overall, is not especially radical, largely a change of date and location. Those aspects that appear radical – the interruption of the 'regular' programming, the use of news reportage techniques – are nothing new. The first derives from Knox's *Broadcasting from the Barricades*, which Welles may have heard, or heard about, during his boyhood travels around Europe. The second plainly emulates MacLeish. Indeed it would be fascinating to know how much rewriting was done between the Thursday and the Sunday of that last week in October 1938

Anyone who tuned in specifically to hear *The Mercury Theatre on the Air's* production of *The War of the Worlds* would have recognised the MacLeish influence. The Mercury Theatre's target audience was highly literate. For the benefit of anyone less well-read who tuned in the listener was told at the beginning, middle and end exactly what was happening:

This is Orson Welles, ladies and gentlemen, out of character to assure you that *The War of the Worlds* has no further significance than as the holiday offering it was intended to be. The Mercury Theatre's own radio version of dressing up in a sheet and jumping out of a bush and saying Boo!

Everyone who listened to radio drama at any level knew who Orson Welles was. He had the most famous voice on radio. In 1937 he was *The Shadow* himself, Lamont Cranston.

The people who panicked – the people for whose benefit Welles might even have written that ending while the play was still being broadcast – were the people who had no knowledge of radio drama but who had retuned their radios when their normal choice, *The Charlie McCarthy Show*, inexplicably began with an operatic aria.⁴⁴

The people who panicked were not drama-aware but they were fully aware of the tension gripping the world in autumn 1938. H G Wells had written in the wake of Percival Lowell's claim that Mars had canals built by super-intelligent creatures.⁴⁵ Welles and Koch wrote in the wake of the Munich Crisis, concluded only thirty-one days earlier. Radio listeners might not all listen to radio drama but they all listened to and trusted the radio news. In May 1938 shortwave technology had enabled Ed Murrow to describe the Nazi annexation of Austria before Hitler even arrived in Vienna. By September Hans V Kaltenborn was giving CBS listeners a blow-by-blow account of the march into the Sudetenland.⁴⁶

This was the *zeitgeist* Welles and Koch tapped into. These were the innovative news techniques they copied. For half a year radio stations had been interrupting regular programming with breaking news of Europe spiralling into war. As they would again twenty years later, ordinary American citizens were watching the skies with dread. In the Cold War many Americans convinced themselves that aliens were coming in flying saucers; in the lead-in to World War II Orson Welles and Howard Koch convinced some listeners the Martians had actually arrived in canisters.¹

¹ Reports of people taking to the streets in terror are doubtless exaggerated. Professor Cantril's 1940 study *The invasion from Mars: a study in the psychology of panic* concluded that of the 6 million who heard the broadcast 1.7 million thought it was genuine news and 1.2 million were genuinely frightened. One has to wonder about the half-million who thought the invasion was real but apparently were not frightened. In fact Cantril's sample was far too small to be representative: "Much of our information was derived from detailed interviews of 135 persons. Over 100 of these persons were selected because they were known to have been upset by the broadcast." (O'Sullivan & Jewkes 1997: 7) In other words, three-quarters of those interviewed at length had made efforts to draw attention to themselves.

5.7 Conclusions

By 1937 American listeners were benefiting from a battle for cultural pre-eminence between the networks. When CBS aired a sustaining Shakespeare series featuring major Hollywood stars, NBC retaliated with John Barrymore as *Hamlet*. Meanwhile Mutual offered Orson Welles in a seven-and-a-half hour serial adaptation of *Les Miserables*. The season beginning May 1938, MacDonald establishes, included, “164 adaptations of stage plays, 60 adaptations of prose and poetry, and 208 plays written specifically for radio.”⁴⁷ Even taking into account America’s three national networks compared to the single UK network, this was a great deal more drama than the British listener had access to. More importantly, the quality of American radio drama was generally equal to the BBC standard and in some cases higher. That *The Fall of the City* should open Gielgud’s *Experimental Hour* acknowledged the superiority of *CBS Workshop* just as, earlier in the decade, BBC productions of *Brigade Exchange* and other *hörspiele* acknowledged German success in blending innovation with high literature.

The BBC’s reliance on dramatisations in the 1930s not only reduced opportunities for original single plays, it was itself the product of a lack of single plays with radiogenic qualities. MacLeish’s plays, *The War of the Worlds* and the German “reported-disaster” dramas were conceived in radio terms whereas the *Experimental Hour* petered out in under a year because there were no British plays innovative enough to include.

It is not, however, the case that there was no experiment in the BBC or even within Gielgud’s department. Throughout the decade the BBC regional stations, particularly Manchester, had been developing an entirely new, wholly radiogenic dramatic form, the dramatic feature.

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Chapter 6: Regionalism and the dramatic feature

6.1 Introduction

Given Gielgud's fixed vision of what a radio play should be, dramatic experiment and development of any new radiogenic dramatic forms would clearly need to be fostered elsewhere. The BBC hierarchy appeared to recognise the value of experiment, setting up an independent Programme Research Department to coincide with Gielgud's appointment. This, however, was more likely a device to ease Jeffrey out of the organisation.

That said, by 1936 the core research unit had become a Features sub-department under Gielgud, retaining a surprising degree of independence. The definition of 'feature' was always amorphous and the feature proper was part of the 1930s documentary movement and thus outside the remit of this study. The earliest features, such as *The Western Land* (1933), were often regional programming. Gielgud began his tenure with an attempt to purge regional drama production yet it was in the Manchester studios that Gielgud's former colleague Archie Harding developed the unique BBC form, the dramatic feature, with Geoffrey Bridson whose *Aaron's Field* is the case study in this chapter.

One innovation welcomed by Gielgud was Listener Research. The Drama Reports Scheme (1937), the BBC's first attempt to measure audience reaction to its programmes, provides a snapshot of the likes and dislikes of the drama-friendly audience on the eve of World War II.

6.2 The Programme Research Department

Hilda Matheson, the BBC's former Director of Talks, writing in 1933, described the elements of what she considered "radio-drama proper":

The obvious secret of such work has been to make every use of impressions, effects and suggestions which the microphone was peculiarly fitted to convey –

rapid changes of aural 'scene' (such as the cinema can provide for the eye), suggestions of infinite distance and infinite closeness, and the general fluidity of time and space.
[Matheson 1933: 112-113]

As examples, she cited two recent dramatisations by E J King Bull, *The Turn of the Screw*^a and "the story which forms the prelude to Mr Walter de la Mare's anthology called *Come Hither...*"^b King Bull was at that time a member of the Programme Research Department, the section created to facilitate the removal of Jeffrey from Productions in December 1928. The memo announcing its creation is worth quoting at length:

At the request of the Assistant Controller (Programmes) a new Department of the Programme Branch has been approved, to be known as the Programme Research Department. Mr R E JEFFREY will be in charge, and the following will be members of it: Messers Sieveking, McConnel, King-Bull and Harding. Its primary function will be creative work in every direction, the only routine responsibility at present being the conduct of the weekly "Surprise Item". It will be particularly concerned with such matters as special feature programmes with or without reference to particular dates. It will be prepared to give any help or suggestions in regard to the presentation of any type of programme. It will experiment and do specialised research work in regard to the technique of radio drama, and will help and train individual artists for dramatic work in the same as is being done in the Music Department. The general functions of this Department may be defined as research, creation and experiment. It will work collateral to, and in close co-operation with, the Productions Department, but each will have independent status.¹

The terms of reference were so all-encompassing there can be no real doubt that the Research Department was seen as a *pro tem* sinecure for Jeffrey and indeed the unit was subsumed back into Gielgud's department when Jeffrey resigned in May 1929.² A degree of independence was retained and a Features subgroup emerged, headed after 1936 by Laurence Gilliam.

Gilliam had succeeded Maschwitz and Gielgud at the *Radio Times* and his 1934 dramatisation of H G Wells's short story *The Man Who Could Work Miracles* is cited by Briggs as one of the dramatic highlights of that year.³ At that time Gielgud saw

^a June 1 1932

^b *Yes and Back Again*, December 19 1931

Gilliam as the ‘favoured son’ to replace Archie Harding. In practice Gilliam in London and Harding in Manchester would together create the BBC feature whilst Harding with his protégé Bridson would create the BBC’s unique contribution to broadcast drama, the dramatic feature.

In 1947 Gielgud described features as “any programme item – other than a radio play – whose author makes use of the specialised technique of radio-dramatic production.”⁴

Gilliam’s view was equally ambivalent:

In its simplest form, the feature programme aims at combining the authenticity of the talk with the dramatic force of a play, but unlike the play, whose business it is to create dramatic illusion for its own sake, the business of the feature is to convince the listener of the truth of what it is saying, even though it is saying it in dramatic form.
[Gilliam 1950: 10]

Although Gilliam’s department played a central role in the British documentary movement of the 1930s these were not actuality but authored recreations. The most influential documentary feature of the early years, cited by Scannell and Cardiff as Harding’s model,⁵ was *The Western Land*,^c an outside broadcast relayed live by landline from the Cornish hamlet of St Hilary, overlooking Mount Bay. Its producer, Filson Young, describes the programme:

It was, and remains, something quite new in form, and contained a real thrill for people who listened with imagination. It was a conversation between four Cornish workers. It was not written by them, because if it had been it would be artless; but it was their thought, their speech, their language written out and given back to them by one who thoroughly knew them and their lives. Such a thing is hopeless without art, because, oddly enough, it requires the artist to put realism into a record of fact.
[Young 1933: 188-189]

Young recognised the special appeal of *The Western Land*; here was true regional programming – one remote region saying something about itself to all the other regions. Such programmes should have been the mainstay of the BBC’s new Regional Scheme from 1929 but in practice the scheme was used to impose centralised uniformity and no departmental head was more virulently anti-regional than Gielgud.

^c October 27 1930 [BBC 1931: 96]

6.3 The Regional Scheme

The BBC began with a regional structure. In addition to its 'main' premises at Marconi's 2LO station in the Strand, it also 'inherited' Metropolitan Vickers' 2ZY in Manchester and Western Electric's 5IT in Birmingham. To these were added Aberdeen (2BD), Belfast (2BE), Bournemouth (6BM), Cardiff (5WA), Glasgow (5SC) and Newcastle (5NO).⁶ The nine 'main' stations created their own broadcast material in theory reflecting their regional identity, but when ten 'relay' stations were added in Sheffield, Leeds-Bradford, Edinburgh, Hull, Stoke-on-Trent, Plymouth, Swansea, Liverpool, Nottingham and Dundee, their purpose was not to increase diversity but to increase coverage; they took their material not from their nearest regional station but by landline from London. Chief Engineer Peter Eckersley's mastery of the telephone network made it technically possible for any main station to relay its material to any other main station for simultaneous broadcast (SB) but as Scannell and Cardiff note, "London held a key position in the network from the start and, while other stations could and did provide SBs for the rest, the principle was established in 1923 that two complete evenings a week should be supplied by London to all the other stations."⁷

Nevertheless each main station was expected to forge links with its regional community and promote its local cultural identity. In drama terms this meant amateurs, either pre-existing groups like the Huddersfield Thespians or specially-formed like the 2ZY Players in Manchester⁸ or the Newcastle Repertory Company.^d Given that in the early days regional radio drama consisted largely of one-act stage plays and scenes from the repertory staple professionalism was not necessarily preferable to enthusiasm, but when it came to dialect drama and comedy sketches quality clearly suffered. In what must have been one of his earliest memos to Gielgud, Lance Sieveking complained of Birmingham's *Hip-hip-hoo-Radio*: "This programme was a disgrace... Unworthy of Bognor Pier."⁹

On January 13 1929 the BBC implemented the *Plan de Bruxelles*, devised by Peter Eckersley and colleagues in the *Union Internationale de Radiophonie* to reduce interference, and replaced its network of nineteen stations with five twin-wave stations

^d See Chapter 4.

(London, Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow and Cardiff) each offering a choice of the National Programme and a Regional Programme.¹⁰ The latter was regional in name only. Since 1924 Reith and Roger Eckersley had been pressing for increased centralisation at the expense of regional autonomy. From January 1 1929 the pressure on those who supplied drama from the Regions increased exponentially with the appointment of Gielgud who for the next thirty-four years was adamant that all drama should be commissioned and produced in London.

In October 1929 he circulated Regional Directors with a memo stating that "Drama is frankly a specialist's job. It cannot properly be handled as a sideline."¹¹ He continued:

I assume the main case of the provinces for the retention of dramatic work is for the sake of their local drama and that this case is based on the firm belief that there really is a strong demand in the provinces for such local drama. I would strongly urge that provincial station directors be asked to consider very carefully whether in this case the wish is not father to the thought."¹²

The use of the derogatory term 'provincial' provoked a furious response at the meeting of Regional Directors the following week.¹³ The Regional Directors were not merely defending their petty kingdoms. Regional drama offered a national platform to provincial playwrights, popular in their native regions but of no real interest to West End producers, writers like Harold Brighouse in Manchester and Eden Philpotts in the West Country. Scotland and Wales additionally had a national literature to both protect and promote.^e Unsurprisingly, therefore, the views of five irate Regional Directors outweighed those of a Drama Director in post for less than a year. Equally it was inevitable that Gielgud would maintain his onslaught. In May 1930 he wrote---

Almost all actors at regional level are amateurs, and have their occupations. They can therefore only be rehearsed between 6 o'clock and nine o'clock in the evening, and regional budgeting seldom allows for what in my view would be adequate rehearsal for professionals in London, let alone for amateurs. The effects staff is only too frequently engaged ad hoc, and is seldom, therefore, anything approaching professionally competent. And finally, the producer is faced (I think this is true of all cases except in that of Scotland) with a dearth of material which, if his regional director demands a continuous supply of plays to be produced from the region, drives him to fall back upon monstrously inferior

^e Northern Ireland was always exempt from the regional debate.

work, or to handle short plays of a type which have no particular regional significance, and could in any case be more competently done in London.¹⁴

At the same time, he instructed key members of his staff to monitor and mock the regional output. This was not simply a case of tuning in at the appropriate hour; Gielgud had to arrange for special telephone relays into Savoy Hill.¹⁵ The Gielgud line is unmistakable. Scotland is acceptable because it has a national identity, anything else is not. Thus King Bull considered Scottish Region's *Mrs Macfarlane Goes West* "an admirable piece of work",¹⁶ but West Region's *The Fugitive* prompted the observation, "I really think that these dialect and local interest plays are a clog on the wheel of provincial broadcasting. They are a fixed commitment to the third rate."¹⁷ Mary Hope Allen was invariably scathing. "This play was so slight that it was almost invisible," she reported of Vincent Douglas's *The Tender Passion*. "It was produced to slow motion and dragged on and on."¹⁸ Likewise, Victor Smythe's production from Manchester of the Newcastle Repertory Company's *Hotspur and Douglas at Newcastle 1388* evoked the comment, "This was by far the worst station production I have yet listened to. The boredom was unrelieved from start to as near finish as I got."¹⁹ These are glib one-liners, in no sense constructive and meant to hurt. Archie Harding was probably nearer the true state of affairs when he wrote of *The Tender Passion*, "like most of the dramas I have heard from the provinces, the sum of one's impressions was 'How dull'."²⁰

Peter Eckersley was forced to resign from the BBC staff in late 1929 following his involvement in a divorce, and his consultancy contract was terminated in September 1930.²¹ Thereafter his brother Roger subverted the Regional Scheme to impose increased centralisation.^f Where the simultaneous broadcasts had been discretionary, the new 'phi' system meant that many London programmes were compulsory. Plays in particular were 'diagonalized', broadcast once on the National Programme, once on the Regional Programme.²²

Centralisation made economic sense but the BBC was ultimately subject to a body politic almost entirely elected in the provinces. In 1935, the shortcomings of the BBC's regional policy were raised before Lord Ullswater's Parliamentary Committee²³ and to

^f As Mark Pegg puts it, "The BBC's Regional Scheme subordinated the local cultural and social needs of listeners to national, economic, technical and even bureaucratic considerations. This was hardly unexpected: the process conformed with the BBC model of monopoly control." (Pegg 1982: 22)

pre-empted censure in a charter renewal year the BBC appointed Charles Siepmann Director of Regional Relations. As Director of Talks Siepmann had been every bit as antagonistic to the Regions as Gielgud but he returned from touring the outlying stations an advocate of increased regional diversity. Following his report spending on regional facilities increased and diagonalization became a two-way process, with Gielgud being expected to include offerings from the regions in his limited airtime.

6.4 Harding, Bridson and the Manchester school

An immediate beneficiary of the Siepmann regime was BBC Manchester, which had always been the best equipped of the regional stations, boasting four studios and a dramatic control panel as early as 1929.²⁴ In drama terms it also had the advantage of Archie Harding, who had been appointed Programme Director of the North Region at the end of August 1933.²⁵ Harding (1903-53) had made his name as both an extreme experimentalist (his production of Ezra Pound's *Testament of François Villon* in October 1931 was described in *The Star* as "the Bright Young Department run riot and getting very near to nonsense"²⁶) and a political radical. Ewan McColl believed that the diplomatic scandal surrounding Harding's *Portrait of Warsaw*, "which juxtaposed Chopin's romantic Poland against the realities of Pilsudski regime", led to his rustication.²⁷ In Manchester, however, Harding and D G (Geoffrey) Bridson created something hitherto alien to BBC programming, a dramatic vehicle for the voice of the working class.

The collaboration began when Harding used Bridson's modernist poem *The Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins* in *Jannock*, "a Malicious Medley of the North", broadcast regionally on November 11 1934. The piece brought Bridson into conflict with BBC censors – lechery "was removed from the script at the last minute"²⁸

Harding believed that serious public broadcasting should reflect the concerns of the majority of listeners. Bridson, despite his admiration for the High Tory T S Eliot and the fascist apologists Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis, was avowedly left wing. Joan Littlewood joined the unit in 1934 and Ewan MacColl made his radio debut in Bridson's *May Day in England*. Anyone who tuned in expecting a celebration of

maypole dancing would have been shocked to find MacColl reciting Bridson's "Song for the Three Million" in an angry Glaswegian growl:

Bank-balance bagmen, we are getting wise
To lickspit platitude and lockstock lies.... [Bridson 1950: 43]

MacColl was meant to play the lead in Bridson's *Prometheus the Engineer* (1934), a verse-play about monetary reform, but "To a policy scrutineer, an argumentative play written around a revolt of the workers was manifestly inspired by the Comintern. *Prometheus the Engineer* was banned by the BBC Controller of Programmes, Colonel Dawney, as being dangerously seditious."²⁹ The embargo was issued at the very last minute. T S Eliot had been invited to Broadcasting House to hear the performance and, though he shared none of the play's sentiments, he was a true enemy of censorship and duly printed the script in *The Criterion*.

In early 1935 *The Scourge* was banned because the Controller thought it condoned incest and Bridson was turned down for the vacancy as Drama Producer North. Undeterred, he then created the first feature series *Harry Hopeful*, based on the *Western Land* model.⁸ Harry was an unemployed glassblower, on the tramp in search of work, an archetypal figure in the North at the height of the Depression but almost unknown in the South. Bridson and his semi-professional lead, the Manchester clock-mender Frank Nicholls, toured the region collecting the testimony of real people which Bridson then shaped into a script for the original speakers to perform, live, in Manchester. Scannell and Cardiff state: "*Harry Hopeful* was one of the very first programmes from the regions to raise the quality of material above the level of anecdotal talks or dialect plays."³⁰ In fact Harding and Bridson had been more subtle, developing anecdote and dialect into an entirely new form, the dramatic feature.

With the success of *Harry Hopeful* Bridson finally joined the BBC staff as Features Programme Assistant. His next offering was heard around the world.^h Bridson recalled that his aim was to do for radio what D W Griffith had done for cinema. "I wanted to

⁸ *Harry Hopeful's Day in the Yorkshire Dales* began the series on May 23 1935 – see Scannell & Cardiff 1991: 340-341

^h *The March of the '45* was first broadcast on February 28 1936 and was expanded to include the battle of Culloden and revived on November 10 1936. There were five BBC productions up to 1949. NBC aired it the US, ABC in Australia. (Bridson 1950: 231).

tell a dramatic story, panoramic in scope, and to make it more immediately exciting than anything that had been heard before.”³¹ As with so much of Bridson’s output, only fragments of *The March of the ’45* were printed in his idiosyncratic collection *The Christmas Child* (1950). The sinewy power of the verse is nevertheless instantly apparent.

Up to the Boar of Badenoch,
Down by the Atholl Sow,
Under the dribble of Loch Garry
An army’s marching now...

[Bridson 1950: 18]

His second masterpiece, the first for which we have a complete text and the only one to be published separately (although an updated version is also included in *The Christmas Child*), was *Aaron’s Field*, the first play to be broadcast by the BBC after the declaration of war.¹

6.5 Case study: “Aaron’s Field” (1939)

Bridson was not yet thirty; men of his age might be expected to react to war with outrage, belligerence, patriotism or fear. Bridson’s reaction was to pen a modern morality play. It works exactly like a medieval morality, an inverse *Everyman* in that *Everyman* encounters the sins of his day personified along his journey whereas Aaron is not going anywhere and thus the 20th century “vices” visit him.

Three-quarters of the play takes place outdoors, in a quiet Pennine dale in what turns out to be September 1939. Two days earlier Aaron retired to his little field after a lifetime of urban labour. Emphasising the artificiality of the morality form, Bridson uses rhyme.

For who is master of his own,
And has a field that’s his to manage,---
Well, he can pick and choose his friends,
And live the life he recommends; [Bridson 1943:3]

¹ Home Service, November 16 1939.

He cannot, however, totally exclude the world. First comes the lawyer, claiming he wants to protect Aaron's interests:

Your vested interest cuts across
All other interests, and concealed
In every leaf and branch you see,
Suspect the hidden enmity. [Bridson 1943:5]

Aaron sends him away. The Squire wants permission to chase hares across Aaron's field. Aaron won't hear of it. He'll plant crops so that if the hunt trespasses he can sue for damages. The Vicar arrives. His boys' football team has always practiced twice weekly in this field. The Vicar automatically assumes Aaron has no objection. Before Aaron can disabuse him, along comes Whittle from the local council. The council wants to build a nice new road through Aaron's field. The Man from the National Trust helpfully suggests Aaron should make over the land to prevent it falling into the hands of builders. The builder offers Aaron £40 but Ripp the Industrialist offers £500. Ripp says he's being driven out of the city by escalating rates. The truth is, however, that he has it on good authority that a war's coming.

I don't say Hitler's a bad fellow,---
I'd like so see him in power out here. [...]
So... Well, to cut the story short,---
When war's declared, I've no desire
To find my mill with a bomb on the roof!
I'm moving out of the line of fire!^j [Bridson 1943:31]

In fact, Ripp *hopes* war will break out because he will "make a packet"³² producing military uniforms. Aaron rounds on him, incensed – but is distracted by whistling in the distance. His first thought is that it's the Vicar's soccer team coming to practice. In fact it's a female ARP Warden. War has been declared. The men will be along to dig shelters in Aaron's field "about ten in the morning"³³. Interestingly, the Warden is the only character in *Aaron's Field* who speaks in prose.

The Industrialist dashes off to protect his property from bombers – a ludicrous idea which sets the scene for the final act. Aaron goes inside and closes his cottage door on

^j In the 1950 collection, the Industrialist has been upgraded to a Capitalist, and he now has no desire "to get an atomic bomb on my roof....!" [Bridson 1950: 84]

the world. He realises his peace is irrelevant in a world at war. Even at his age, there are things he can do to aid the war effort.

Perhaps fill sandbags for the town,
Or even dig a shelter or two. [Bridson 1943:34]

A bomber flies low overhead – how powerful that effect must have been to a 1939 audience. Aaron gives a half-scream but eventually the threat passes. Or does it? Bridson's final scene is wonderfully ambiguous. Someone knocks gently on the door. Aaron is not sure if the Man standing there is Christ or someone from the ARP. The former is implicit but never specific. The Man^k says that Aaron will become part of the field forever and Aaron realises how:

And night shall hold no fears again
While Aaron sleeps in Aaron's Field... [Bridson 1943: 40]

The Man was clearly a matter of some controversy in 1939, two years before *The Man Born to be King*. Bridson feels obliged to add a note to the published text:

As regards the Man, a lot has been argued for and against him. But the character as I understand him is primarily the projection of an idea which Aaron himself would probably have hoped to see realised. He is, if you like, the personification of Aaron's wishful thinking. [Bridson 1943: 41-2]

Largely on account of Bridson, BBC North was the most innovative of the prewar Regions. The other Regions nevertheless contributed drama to the national schedules. In 1938, for example, Midland Region launched *Paul Temple* and in October the National Programme included an eighty-minute production of *What Every Woman Knows* from Southern Region.³⁴ In July 1939 H J Dunkerley, Programme Director, Midland Region, was offering *The Rugeley Murder*^l for inclusion in the National Programme on the Friday evening of Week 46. Similarly, Week 48, the planned Drama Week,³⁵ would include West Region's revival of *The Farmer's Wife* and *Unflinching* from Wales.^m In the event, the entire drama schedule was cancelled on the outbreak of war and regional broadcasting suspended for the duration.

^k In 1950, the man becomes *The Stranger*.

^l Presumably the poisoner Samuel Palmer.

^m A new West Region production facility had opened in Bristol, allowing Cardiff to concentrate its resources on Welsh programming.

6.6 The Drama Reports scheme

For all their relevance and undoubted quality, dramatic features were not especially popular with the drama audience. This can be stated with confidence as the BBC's first attempt to determine audience reaction to its programmes was the Drama Reports Scheme carried out by Robert Silvey's new Listener Research Department in early 1937. The populist Gielgud was an enthusiastic supporter and in 1934 had appealed on air for audience input in the formulation of drama policy. According to Pegg, 12700 listeners responded, some of whom were later included in Silvey's Drama Panel.³⁶

The aim of the project was not to measure the audience numerically, nor was an attempt made to survey a representative cross section of society. "We had to accept that at this time there was not the remotest possibility of using orthodox sampling methods to recruit the panel," Silvey recalled. "This meant that we would not be able to demonstrate that the views we collected reflected those of the actual audiences..."³⁷

It was accepted from the outset that certain people listened to drama whilst others did not. Neither Silvey nor Gielgud was at that stage concerned as to why some people never listened to drama or why others only listened occasionally. The panel members recruited by Silvey were chosen because they already listened to drama and features more often than not. 75 panellists had previously contacted the BBC regarding drama, 46 read about the experiment and volunteered themselves, and the remaining 300 were nominated by "officials of the Corporation."³⁸ An attempt was made to ensure a regional spread.ⁿ 319 panellists continued after the experimental month (January 31 to February 27 1937), joined by 48 new recruits. The survey was extended to a total of four months and over this period 47 productions generated 9600 returned questionnaires.

The questionnaires were sent in weekly batches to the panel members. The version given at Appendix 2 is the standard questionnaire but there were variations and Silvey noted "that the questionnaire for each production was drawn up in consultation with the producer concerned and was not issued without the approval of the Director of Features

ⁿ In practice the balance was biased against the metropolitan centre. London, home to 700,000 licence holders, supplied 72 panel members compared to 89 from the Northern Counties where only 370,000 licences had been issued.

and Drama.”³⁹ Panellists were also encouraged to write free comments on the back of the form. Given that the panellists had either put themselves forward as drama enthusiasts or drawn attention to themselves through spontaneous correspondence, it is not surprising that “normally six out of ten of those who enjoyed a broadcast felt moved to make additional remarks upon it, but of those who did not enjoy it seven out of ten felt impelled to make further comments.”⁴⁰

From the responses Silvey put the plays in order of popularity and from that list drew general conclusions. Given that there were only 47 productions in the four months of the study, such conclusions were inevitably subject to argument. For example, Silvey’s main conclusion that adaptations of contemporary plays were seen as having the highest entertainment value can be entirely ascribed to the fact that the two most popular plays, *Old English* by John Galsworthy and J M Barrie’s *Dear Brutus*, were written by a Nobel Prize winner and one of the most popular living playwrights respectively.

Equally the sample was too small in respect of original radio plays to allow anything more than the truism that “Plays written specially for radio – judged by the same entertainment standard – have varied very much in their reception. Philip Wade’s *Wait for Me* is an example of a specially written radio play which was considered to be very entertaining, while Richard Hughes’ *We Gave our Grandmother* failed in this respect.”⁴¹

Wait for Me^o was the most popular original play (equal 6th in order of popularity). In the supporting documentation the comment was made: “There is no doubt that the play was generally felt to be ‘good radio’. Several listeners specifically remarked upon Mr Philip Wade’s mastery of radio technique.”⁴² Hughes’ play,^p by contrast, trailed in 45th place and was “enjoyed by only about 50% of those who reported, but among these about half were enthusiastic. Among those who did not enjoy it a minority violently disliked it.”⁴³ Elsewhere, a memorandum noted that the humour was “undergraduate” and that the play “needed shortening”.⁴⁴ The second most popular original, *His Father’s*

^o National Programme, Tuesday February 9 10-11.15pm (producer not known)

^p National Programme, Wednesday May 5 9.20-10.10pm, produced by Sieveking

Sword by Anthony Ellis^q (19th equal) was about Napoleon and Josephine and the only other original, *Beware of Influalgid*^r by H R Jeans (24th equal), was another comedy in dubious taste about a new disease. This “Pleased most listeners as an amusing but slight sketch, but one-third of those who reported said they would not have listened to the end if they had not been members of the drama panel.”⁴⁵

Although the quality of the script was considered the most important factor, production was a prime consideration for Silvey’s respondents: “it was the unpopularity of the methods of production employed in *The Ticket-of-Leave Man*, which helped to rank this play as ‘liked least of all.’”⁴⁶ The production of Tom Taylor’s 1863 melodrama^s was by Peter Creswell, the original producer of *Carnival*. Unfortunately Silvey gives no indication what offended the audience about his methods in this instance.

Features were “seldom dramatic enough”.⁴⁷ Silvey claimed “overwhelming evidence that listeners feel that too great a proportion of dramatic programme time is at present given to feature programmes to the detriment of the quality of the feature programmes themselves, and the quantity of ‘straight’ plays which might be broadcast.”⁴⁸ The most popular feature, John Cheatle and Mary Hope Allen’s adaptation of *Louisa Wants a Bicycle* or *The Fight for Woman’s Freedom* by Irene Clephane, nevertheless came equal 13th in order of popularity despite the fact that it was only offered once, on the Regional Programme,^t and only 28% of the panel listened, all of whom enjoyed it.⁴⁹ “The general feeling was that it had a dramatic quality and lacked the scrappiness so often criticised in feature programmes.”⁵⁰

Overall, the report was supportive of Gielgud’s general policy – original radio plays were worthwhile when done properly but disastrous when not, features were a frippery and the backbone of drama programming – because it was the most popular form with the listeners – must be adaptations of reasonably contemporary stage plays together with the occasional Shakespeare. Inevitably, Silvey confirmed the status quo. Original radio plays were a once-a-month rarity in 1937 and, given the variable quality of

^q National Programme, Thursday April 15 9.20-10pm, produced by Creswell

^r National Programme, Sunday May 2 1937 10-10.35pm, produced by Creswell.

^s National Programme, Tuesday March 16 1937 7.45-9pm

^t Wednesday May 26 8.15-9.00pm, produced by Cheatle

dramatic features, adapted stage plays were all that a self-selecting panel of drama aficionados was likely to consider worthwhile. The voice conspicuously missing is that of the listener who had never encountered drama before it came on the wireless.

6.7 Conclusions

The BBC feature derived from the Programme Research Department and thus from the pioneers of the experimental period. The radical evolution of the form took place in Manchester under Harding, himself a former member of the Department, with the benefit of increased regional funding after Siepmann's report. The creation of the wholly new form, the dramatic feature, was Bridson's, first with *The March of the '45*, secondly with *Aaron's Field*. What made these works different from the standard radio play was primarily the fact that they were theme-based rather than character- or plot-based. The traditional three- or five-act play structure could be dispensed with as events outside the control of the characters determined the outcome. In *Aaron's Field*, indeed, the speakers are types rather than individuals. The use of earlier narrative or dramatic forms (the ballad and the moral interlude) are Bridson traits but, such was his influence, became signatures of the form. Equally, Bridson happened to be a fluent versifier with a belief in the democratic power of poetry spoken aloud;^u the plays that followed Bridson's lead showed their derivation by being in verse.^v

Nationally, meanwhile, drama output had homogenized by 1937-38. Adaptations and dramatisations outweighed the original single play. The single play, at least during the period of the Drama Reports, could be crudely divided into two strands, the sentimental historic and juvenile humour. What limited innovation there was tended to come from the regions – the dramatic feature from Manchester, the dramatic serial from Birmingham – but these were minor players, not especially favoured by Silvey's self-selecting respondents. Inevitably, the panellists responded well to the status quo; that was all there was until the declaration of war changed everything.

^u See "On Spoken and Written Poetry" Bridson 1950: 3-12

^v See Chapter 7

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Chapter 7: Propaganda and morale

7.1 Introduction

The outbreak of war in September 1939 destroyed Gielgud's middlebrow, pseudo-theatrical blueprint for radio drama. Initially, all drama disappeared from schedules given over entirely to war programming. Over the coming months, the period of the so-called Bore War, drama gradually returned in new forms which better suited the wartime ethos. Series like *The Saviours* and *The Man Born to be King* aimed to bolster morale, although the first great BBC drama sequence, *The Shadow of the Swastika*, was a history of Nazism which stopped short of outright condemnation at a time when a negotiated settlement with Hitler was still deemed possible.

By 1942 America had entered hostilities, Russia had switched allegiance, and ultimate victory – however delayed and at whatever cost – was inevitable. The debate play, Gielgud's favoured form, returned in three plays by Eric Linklater, but a wider debate was that between the two wings of Gielgud's department, Drama and Features. *Saturday Night Theatre*, an escapist theatre of the air, began in 1943 and showcased Gielgud's second radio repertory company. Features, meanwhile, remained with the war effort. Norman Corwin, the star writer of CBS, introduced a form of drama documentary with his transatlantic co-production *An American in England*, which Gilliam's sub-department developed into an idiosyncratic British hybrid exemplified by Cecil McGivern's *Junction X* – the case study in this chapter – a broadcast considered so important in terms of Home Front propaganda that it was issued in booklet form by the War Office.

7.2 “The Shadow of the Swastika”

Perhaps the most serious criticism of the BBC is that its programmes are too often removed from reality, that the Corporation is too much concerned with keeping its hands clear of controversy at all costs.

[Lloyd and Vinogradoff 1940: 9]

Such a criticism could be levied at any time in BBC history. The fact that it was written in April 1940, in the eighth month of World War II, makes it especially damning. Where American commercial networks had been airing overtly anti-Nazi plays since 1937, the BBC had assimilated the appeasement policy of the Chamberlain government.^a The truth, of course, was that many influential Britons were supportive of the German fascist regime until war was declared.

The BBC approached Arthur Lloyd and Igor Vinogradoff in October 1939 and commissioned a dramatic history of Nazism. An original drama series to be broadcast over a period of two and a half months was a considerable undertaking for an organisation with scant experience of the form. Indeed, it went against expectations that any airtime should be given up to drama of any kind so early in the war. The plan was that existing programme strands, with the exception of religion and the *Children's Hour*, would be drastically reduced to make room for war broadcasting. Drama and Features were to be reduced from sixteen hours a week to four.¹ As it turned out, the next seven months were what the Americans called the Phoney War, the British the Bore War, and by October 1939 drama was gradually reappearing, albeit in a straitened condition.

Plans had been made during the Munich Crisis of 1938 to disperse BBC departments around the country in the event of war.² Drama and Features moved to Wood Norton Hall near Evesham on September 1 1939.³ Inevitably, this meant an end to the multi-studio system; inevitably, since actors could no longer combine radio and stage work, an in-house repertory company had to be reconstituted. Despite the failed experiment of 1930, the second drama repertory company proved a tremendous success. Silvey reported:

Some misgivings were felt lest the frequent use of familiar voices should irritate listeners. Inquiries showed that these misgivings were not well founded; far from this being the case, the prevalent feeling was positively in favour of the use of the 'reps', considerable interest being taken in hearing well-known voices in different roles.⁴

^a In 1938 S W Smithers saw nothing untoward with the statement that "when Laurence Gilliam was in Germany, an official of the Reich broadcasting organization paid a tribute to the way in which the story of the 'Emden', famous German naval raider, was told." [Smithers 1938: 83]

The repertory provided almost all the cast of *Shadow of the Swastika*. Alan Wheatley, for example, later known to a generation of children as ITV's Sheriff of Nottingham, played Goebbels. Gilliam produced the series but Gielgud claims the credit for casting Hitler. Eventually, he recalls, "Marius Goring played the part with marked ability, stamina, and success."⁵ The structure of the series was unusual.

Shadow of the Swastika consisted of eight programmes and an Epilogue. Two of these eight were in the form of panoramic surveys of the whole of Nazi history from 1918 to 1940. They were made up in the main of scenes extracted from the scripts presented in this book. [Lloyd & Vinogradoff 1940: 13]

The six substantive episodes were "The Rise of a Leader" (November 17 1939), "The Road to Power" (November 29 1939), "The Reichstag Fire" (December 14 1939), "Hitler Over Germany" (December 28 1939), "The Shadow Spreads" (January 11 1940), and "The Road to War" (January 25 1940).⁶ All were broadcast on the new Home Service, with music by George Walter.

Neither Lloyd nor Vinogradoff is known as a playwright yet they demonstrate fluency in a new kind of dramatic writing, much more naturalistic than British dramatic writing had been before. They are equally adept in using dramatic structures at that time more commonly associated with film. Thus "The Rise of a Leader" ends with something of a cliffhanger. The police have opened fire on Nazi marchers in Munich on November 9 1923. Hitler is wounded and driven away by Dr Schultz.

However many are dead, this is not the end. I am not dead. Nor yet are my ambitions. But – oh, my arm! My arm! Get me away from here! Drive faster! Faster! *Faster!*" [Lloyd and Vinogradoff 1940: 48]

The temptation to make Hitler and his acolytes risible is resisted. The series ends, startlingly, with voices of German triumphalism after war is declared – "You were born to die for Germany!" – undercut, after a moment's silence, with one of very few female voices in the six plays asking, quietly, "Men and women of Germany! *Were* you not born to live? Were you born to die for – *Hitlerism?*"⁷

The Hitler of the six plays is neither a madman nor a fool. He is a man perhaps deluded, certainly wrongheaded, but still a man Britain can negotiate with. *Shadow of the Swastika* is unique as the only significant dramatic work of the Bore War. When it

ended in January 1940 Chamberlain still clung to office. Many important people still believed that it was possible to secure an honourable peace with Germany. Many people at all levels of society, from the East End to stately homes, still condoned Hitler's policies if not his actions. All empathy ended with the German invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940, the fall of France and the humiliating retreat from Dunkirk in June. German aircraft were flying over the British coastline. Invasion seemed inevitable, defeat more likely than not. This was not a time to "know thine enemy" but to "know thyself".

7.3 Boosting morale: series and serials

On September 11 1939 Gielgud had been instructed by memorandum to pursue plays of the "*Children's Hour* type."⁸ In 1941 the novelist and playwright Clemence Dane and Dorothy L Sayers, best known as a writer of detective fiction, both produced series ostensibly of the specified type yet intended to stiffen the national backbone in the darkest hour. Gielgud wrote, "They made plays both moving and appropriate, broadcast during months when, if ever, the English, sorely needing help, stood alone and stood fast."⁹

The Saviours consists of seven plays, with music by Dane's longstanding collaborator, Richard Addinsell.^b Like *Shadow of the Swastika* before it and *The Man Born to be King* after, it was not broadcast at the same time every week. Instead of using series to anchor the listener to a particular programming slot – as was the case with a serial like *Paul Temple* – the idea seems to have been to make the listener scan the listings more often and thus introduce the listener to other programmes. *The Saviours*, however, is not a series in the same sense as *Shadow of the Swastika* and *The Man Born to be King*. The seven plays are self-contained narratives linked by a theme:

These seven plays are based on the legend which the British share with many other nations – the legend of a hero who helps his people to become strong and civilised, and then disappears. Bad times follow, and to comfort themselves the

^b Dane and Addinsell would seem (from the list of publications in the front of the 1942 edition) to have prepared an opera version of *The Saviours*.

peoples spread the rumour that hero isn't really dead, but will one day return and bring back with him the Golden Age. [Dane 1942: v]

The continuing narrator is Merlin, who inhabits a magically enhanced world where he can talk with swans and slip between verse and prose, narration and participation. Even so, the plays are not allegories like the plays of MacLeish; the characters are rounded, the history as accurate as it needs to be – the sort of straightforward, uncritical history that Peach had perfected in countless *Children's Hour* playlets.^c

The first play is about Merlin himself, eighteen years old when we meet him, but already an avatar of an earlier hero: "I am Hector, remembered by the lost women of Troy..."¹⁰ This is the Dark Age world according to Geoffrey of Monmouth. The Romans have abandoned Britain and treacherous Saxons have dethroned the Romano-British Over-King Vortiger. "The White Dragon of Germany has mastered the Red Dragon of Britain."¹¹

Dane is both playful and patriotic. She references her broadcasting slot – "Now, King Vortiger," Merlin says, "men have broken into my play-hour and brought me here"¹² – and constructs her drama to serve her message, inventing a duplicitous adviser for Queen Rowenna mainly to allow Merlin to cry "God, how I hate this German spy!"¹³ Similarly, he reminds Vortiger of "the night of the Long Knives".¹⁴

Merlin is the "saviour" of Britain inasmuch as he foresees the saviours yet to come.^d Dane leaves no doubt as to who is the most relevant saviour of Britain. In Play Seven a schoolmaster is asking a class of boys to name the members of the Asquith cabinet:

THE SCHOOLMASTER: ... And who's at the Admiralty?
EVANS: Churchill! [Dane 1942: 250]

Sayers is subtler. The references are there – in the fourth play, the Roman centurion Proculus greets a comrade with "We haven't met since the last German war"¹⁵ – but the Romans are not metaphors for the Nazis. Oddly – disturbingly – it is the Jews who chose Barabbas who are likened to Nazis:

^c See, for example, Peach's *Famous Men of Britain*, Pitman, London, 1938.

^d The second play, "The Hope of Britain", is King Arthur, the third, "England's Darling", King Alfred. In Play Four the saviour is Robin Hood, in Play Five (inexplicably) the Elizabethan Earl of Essex. Play Six is Nelson and seven a montage surrounding the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Westminster Abbey.

...and when at last Jesus is brought out to them, the howl of execration must hit one like a blow in the face. (The expression 'A'arrh!' indicates that frightful wild-best noise made by Nazis and boxing-fans – a sort of rhythmic blood-yell.
[Sayers 1943: 267]

The Man Born to be King was a religious commission. The Rev J W Welch, Director of Religious Broadcasting, had been impressed by Sayers' 1938 Nativity play *He That Should Come* and wanted her to write a series of plays for the *Sunday Children's Hour* about the life of Christ.¹⁶ Sayers had conditions: she wanted realism; she wanted Gielgud, who had produced *He That Should Come*, to produce the series; and most controversially she wanted Christ to be in it. It is hard to appreciate just how scandalous this was at the time. Such a thing would not have been permitted on the stage but radio drama was never subject to the Lord Chamberlain's Office. However, as the scripts began to be delivered and the BBC saw the tone Sayers was taking, its officials sought advice.

On 28 August, the Earl of Clarendon, Censor of Plays at the Lord Chamberlain's Office, wrote to the Director-General of the BBC, F W Ogilvie, confirming that there would be no objection as no one would appear publicly taking the part of Christ."¹⁷

In other words, because this was radio, Christ would not have a mortal face. His voice was supplied by Robert Speaight. There is a belief, held by Low amongst others,¹⁸ that Speaight's identity was withheld but he is credited like anyone else in the 1943 edition and went on to cameo as Christ in Gielgud's follow-up to the Sayers sequence, Hugh Ross Williamson's four-part *Paul, a Bond Slave* (1944).¹⁹

The Man Born to be King was commissioned for the *Children's Hour* and went out in the Sunday afternoon slot roughly once every four weeks, but it is not written as children's drama and clearly grew beyond the original brief in the writing process. Detective fiction was Sayers' breadwinner, Christianity her passion. She spends twenty-three pages explaining the theology in the published text and each play is prefaced by pages of detailed notes, most of which she sent to Gielgud with the script. What she achieves, on the other hand, is a realistic yet divine Christ at large in an ordinary, recognisable world. This is what stoked the controversy.

...although the BBC had not expected a row. there was a row following a lively Press Conference on 10 December, when Miss Sayers read a long prepared statement explaining what she wanted to do – ‘to present the story not in the form of a devotional exercise, but primarily as a piece of real life, enacted by human beings against the stormy social and political background of first-century Palestine.’
[Briggs 1970: 627]

The narrative of the twelve plays is continuous and most of the characters continuing.⁶ Sayers invents two important recurring characters, the Roman soldier Proculus, captain of Herod’s bodyguard at the time of the Nativity and the Centurion at the Crucifixion (“Son of God he called himself – and so I believe he was”²⁰), and Baruch the Zealot. Baruch is the more startling creation because it is he who persuades Judas to betray Christ. Judas is not the villain but the victim of calculating priests and politicians. Jesus has no political dimension, thus the politicians see him as their enemy. Judas betrays his Messiah because Caiaphas convinces him that Jesus does in fact have a worldly agenda:

CIAIPHAS: ... The motives of successful demagogues are apt to become less lofty as they go on. If at any time he were to weaken in the spiritual purity of his intentions---

JUDAS: I should be the first to denounce him... [Sayers 1943: 176]

This is the language of *realpolitik*, not *Children’s Hour*. First Century Palestinians speak like ordinary people of the Blitz, although Sayers wisely resists the temptations of dialect. Sometimes the modernisms jar (“Benjie! Sam! Come on! there’s some chaps goin’ to be crucified.”²¹) but the intended effect is to chart in sound Christ’s development from carpenter to Godhead. When he first appears at the mass baptism in Jordan, Jesus is like everyone else. He evens says so: “It’s right to begin this way, like everybody else.”²² By the end, having risen from the tomb, his speech has become incantatory, divine:

⁶ The twelve plays of the sequence are “Kings in Judea” (the Nativity), December 21 1941; “The King’s Herald” (Christ’s baptism), January 25 1942; “A Certain Nobleman” (the wedding at Cana) February 8 1942; “The Heirs to the Kingdom” (Christ begins his ministry), March 8 1942; “The Bread of Heaven” (feeding the five thousand), April 12 1942; “The Feast of the Tabernacles” (the revelation of Christ’s divinity) May 3 1942; “The Light and the Life” (raising Lazarus from the dead), May 31 1942; “Royal Progress” (the entry into Jerusalem), June 28 1942; “The King’s Supper” (the Last Supper), July 26 1942; “The Princes of this World” (the trials of Christ), August 23 1942; “King of Sorrows” (the Crucifixion), September 20 1942; and “The King Comes into His Own” (the Resurrection), October 18 1942.

Indeed and indeed I tell you, when you were young you girded yourself and walked as you chose. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and others will gird you and carry you to a place that is not of your choosing.

[Sayers 1943: 34]

The series was a mammoth undertaking given the wartime conditions at the BBC.^f However, unlike the plays discussed hitherto, *The Man Born to be King* has entered national culture. People know about it who have never encountered it. Its importance was recognised at the time. It was re-performed more than once and broadcast as a morale-booster to Canada, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa.²³

7.4 Three debate plays by Eric Linklater

Gielgud considered that “1942 was notable ... for Eric Linklater’s arrival in the front rank of radio dramatists.”²⁴ One reason why Gielgud likes Linklater is that Linklater is perhaps the only significant radio dramatist to write debate plays in the manner of *Red Tabs*. Linklater, however, takes the debate play further than Gielgud had and perhaps closer to its roots. In *Red Tabs* Gielgud had engineered situations where realistic characters could convincingly argue out his proposition. Linklater, on the other hand, abandons realism entirely. His characters are ciphers, very like the ‘humours’ in a medieval moral interlude. Linklater’s ‘moral’ is that the great powers should manage the postwar peace and that Britain was in every sense co-equal with the United States, Russia and China. Where Dane wrote about salvation from the darkness and Sayers about overcoming the suffering of the blitz, Linklater was writing after America and Russia joined the Allies. The inexhaustible wealth of America and the inexhaustible human resource of Russia guaranteed victory in the long run.

^f As Gielgud writes in his Production Note: “Not one of the plays made use of a cast of less than thirty-five, and not one of them could be allowed more than forty-eight hours within which to be rehearsed and produced. Before the war I would not have dreamed of undertaking plays of their calibre with less than a week’s rehearsal, with all the advantages of a dramatic control panel and a suite of studios...” [Sayers 1943: 41]

The three plays all aired in the space of ten months.⁸ *The Cornerstones* and *Socrates Asks Why* are linked, both set in Elysium with some of the same characters and sharing one very un-radiophonic device – television.

Conveniently placed for the entertainment of the others is one of those Elysian television-sets which, with their unrestricted range and free selection, allow the inhabitants to see all they want of the world's activity. [Linklater 1942: 55]

Clearly, Linklater chose to publish his radio plays in stage format, no doubt hoping for theatrical production. On radio, presumably, the effect was achieved by mock reportage. The presence in both plays of a character in vision but asleep until virtually the end is not so easily translated into radio terms. The conclusion has to be that the printed texts of *The Cornerstones* and *Socrates Asks Why* are not reliable records of what was heard on the Home Service.

In *The Cornerstones* Confucius, Abraham Lincoln and Lenin are joined in Elysium by twenty year-old Flying Officer Arden of the RAF. The ‘sages’ have been debating why anyone should still consider going to war. Arden tells them why:

Germany was on the warpath, and we had to fight, not only for ourselves, but for the sake of general decency. I thought we should have gone to war in 1938. That year between Munich and the attack on Poland was almost intolerable.

[Linklater 1941: 34]

Arden and Lincoln reappear in *Socrates Asks Why*. Arden is escorting a US Marine Sergeant and an Argyll and Sutherland piper to the “Transit Camp”. The Sergeant and the Piper recount the story of their deaths, on a Pacific Island and in the Malayan jungle respectively, with pride. Both then attack their governments for allowing war to break out in the first place. The Sergeant reasons, “It was Big Business in the United States that sold Japan most of its armament”²⁵ and the Piper says, “It was the same with us, just the same. There were about three million on the dole in Britain at one time. And our foreign policy was more bankrupt than that.” The shortcomings of government notwithstanding, both men concur that the Germans and the Japanese are inhuman. The Piper describes the horrors of concentration camps and Nazi atrocities in

⁸ Linklater explains in a note facing the title page of *The Raft and Socrates Asks Why* (1942), “*The Cornerstones* was published in December of last year, and twice broadcast early in this. *The Raft* was broadcast in August, and *Socrates Asks Why* in early October 1942.”

Czechoslovakia.^h The Sergeant remembers the 1938 rapes and killings in Nanking, described to him by his wife, a nurse. "My wife's a widow now, and she's got a child I've never seen. But if that child can live his life in a world where there's never another Nanking massacre, then I reckon we didn't waste our time on Wake Island."²⁶

Linklater's argument has moved on since *The Cornerstones*. In 1941 he argued for a United Nations to keep the peace, now its purpose is to suppress the enemy. "It is fairly clear that Germany and Japan will never respect anything but a strength much greater than their own."²⁷

The Raft, which separates the two Elysian plays, is pure patriotism. In the allegorical setting of the afterlife Linklater used everyday speech. In the apparently realistic setting of a raft carrying the survivors of a torpedoed ship his language is heightened, with an almost liturgical cadence. This is because the Lieutenant, Second Mate, Stoker, Wireless Operator, Gunner and Passenger are actually floating "in the borderland between life and death."²⁸

The Lieutenant starts the debate with the statement: "I believe in the people of this kingdom."²⁹ The Wireless Operator challenges him, citing the exploitation of the Empire; the Stoker describes Depression poverty in Durham, South Wales, and Highland Scotland; but the Lieutenant will not be swayed from his belief in the fundamental virtue of the British nation.

Nobody is going to deny that we have made tragic mistakes and committed the most destructive follies... But it would be ridiculous to talk about nothing else. In justice to ourselves we should speak, from time to time, of what we have done well.
[Linklater 1942: 40]

The Passenger confirms that it was the resilience of ordinary British men and women that brought the United States into the war. And the entry of the Americans meant that "victory, however long it might take to come, had been assured."³⁰

^h America was equally appalled by war crimes in Czechoslovakia. The destruction of the village of Lidice in June 1942, in retaliation for the assassination of Heydrich, led to the poet Edna St Vincent Millay's powerful verse drama *The Murder of Lidice*, broadcast by NBC on October 19 1942.

7.5 Broadcasting overseas

Silvey, in his 1944 essay “Radio audience research in Great Britain”, notes a significant shift in domestic listening habits between September 1941 and September 1942. Audience enthusiasm for Variety fell by 16% over the year whilst enthusiasm for Plays rose by 11%.³¹ The most popular ‘plays’ in 1942 were in fact adaptations of films, all of which were on general release in cinemas. *Next of Kin* attracted 24% of the adult population (cross-referenced against Silvey’s figures quoted in Gompertz,³² this is about 7.2 million), *How Green Was My Valley* drew 22% (6.6 million) and *The Young Mr Pitt* 19% (5.7 million). The only high rating for an original play was 20% (6 million) for *The Weakness of Frau Borkhardt* by James Parish.ⁱ The more usual audience for an original play was 2.65 million.

The distinguishing feature of the Parish play, an otherwise simplistic telephone parable on the theme of “Careless Talk Costs Lives”, was that it was broadcast on the General Forces Programme which had replaced the Regional Service for the duration. Drama was a rarity on the Forces Programme albeit the flamboyant pulp novelist Peter Cheyney collaborated with Gielgud (who professed to loathe pulp fiction) on a series of original fifteen-minute thrillers featuring his most popular characters aimed specifically at the beleaguered British Expeditionary Force in March and April 1940:

Hello... This is Alonzo MacTavish, commonly known as the Kid Glove Crook, Europe’s premier remover of unconsidered trifles, calling the British Expeditionary Force. [Cheyney 1944: 167]

Drama, however, was used as a tool to win American support for the war. Before December 1941 American public opinion, moulded by key opinion-formers, was that the US should actively oppose the war.

Although Britain’s situation early in the war was a perilous one, there were strong expressions of anti-British sentiment in the United States, particularly from conservative elements in American society such as the America First Committee and the Hearst press. But some also came from the Popular Front. In 1940, the America First Committee hired Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn (BBD&O), the same advertising agency that produced the *Cavalcade of America*

ⁱ June 19 1942.

series, to produce a series of recorded programs opposing aid to Britain.

[Blue 2002: 225]

American networks were wholly dependent on agencies like BBD&O but to their credit continued to broadcast non-sponsored anti-Nazi, pro-British drama. Left-wing, anti-fascist writers clustered at CBS, supported by producer William Robson.^j Between February and May 1941 CBS broadcast the sustaining anthology, *The Free Company Presents*, ten plays by leading playwrights celebrating American freedoms and by implication condemning fascist dictatorships.^k

CBS's star writer was Norman Corwin who had only joined the network as a staff writer in 1938 but by 1939 had his own sustaining series, *Words Without Music*. Corwin was fervently pro-British; *To Tim at Twenty*^l was about an RAF gunner who writes a letter to his infant son in case he doesn't return from his next mission. In October 1941 President Roosevelt put MacLeish in charge of a new Office of Facts and Figures, MacLeish installed CBS vice-president William B Lewis as the head of the OFF radio division, and Lewis – with implicit presidential backing – commissioned Corwin to write the official celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Bill of Rights. It was to be an all-star production which necessitated Corwin travelling from New York to Hollywood. He was on the transcontinental train, the script unfinished, when he heard news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour.³³ By the time *We Hold These Truths* went on air eight days later, America was at war. By presidential decree all four networks carried the broadcast simultaneously and 63 million listeners heard Orson Welles' opening speech:

One hundred-fifty years is not long in the reckoning of a hill. But to a man it's long enough.

One hundred-fifty years is a weekend to the redwood tree, but to a man it's two full lifetimes.

^j See Barnouw's *Radio Drama in Action: Twenty-Five Plays of a Changing World* (1945).

^k The ten Free Company plays were *The People With Light Coming Out of Them* (William Saroyan), *The Mole on Lincoln's Cheek* (Marc Connelly), *An American Crusader* (Robert Sherwood), *One More Free Man* (James Boyd), *Freedom's a Hard Bought Thing* (Stephen Vincent B  net), *His Honor, the Mayor* (Orson Welles), *A Start in Life* (Paul Green), *The States Talking* (Archibald MacLeish), *The Miracle on the Danube* (Maxwell Anderson) and *Above Suspicion* (Sherwood Anderson, completed by colleagues after his death). See <http://roads-j.org/mr/edu/1930s/RADIO/FreeCompany.html>.

^l August 19 1940.

One hundred-fifty years is a twinkle to a star, but to a man it's time enough to teach six generations the meaning is of liberty, how to use it, when to fight for it.
[Corwin 1944: 130]

Corwin's next project for the OFF was *This is War!* (1942), but even after US mobilisation dissenting voices could still secure network airtime. Sloten cites William Benton and Sherman Dryer, respectively vice-president in charge and programme director of the *University of Chicago Round Table*, syndicated nationally by NBC:

By broadcasting the *This is War!* series, Dryer believed the government was forcing a 'hysterical dramatic propaganda series down the throats of all of the four networks, and is going all-out to hystericize the American people every Saturday night.³⁴

The problem was, mainland America was in no direct danger given the military technology of the time. A resident of Texas, for example, had no way of empathising with a blitzed resident of London's East End. The BBC tackled this problem in two ways, both based in the Drama and Features Department.

Front Line Family, often wrongly identified as Britain's first open-ended family-based serial or soap, was devised by the Canadian Alan Melville primarily for the BBC's North American service. Rudolf Arnheim, having lambasted American soap opera for ignoring the war (with the notable exception of Sandra and Peter Michael's *Against the Storm*)^m commends *Front Line Family* as a superior article:

The experiences of a London family during the aerial bombardments are not presented as a melodrama of high-strung passion, tears, crime and overdrawn suspense nor in the high-flown clichés of cheap patriotism. The plot is focused on the psychological, social, and economic effects of the blitzkrieg, and the dramatic impact of the facts comes out all the more strongly because these facts are dealt with in the almost casual, jolly, but grimly matter-of-fact way which is so characteristic of the British reaction to the terror of the luftwaffe.³⁵

At the same time Bridson, now seconded to London and Gilliam's *de facto* deputy, collaborated on *Transatlantic Call – People to People*, a series produced by the BBC one week and CBS the next. The success of *Transatlantic Call* prompted Lewis and the OFF to commission Corwin's *An American in England*, nine programmes to be

^m See Barnouw 1945: 348-351 for a sample episode.

produced in London, shortwaved back to America and broadcast live by CBS. Recordings would then be broadcast in Britain.ⁿ

Neither Gielgud nor Briggs makes any mention of Corwin's visit – a serious omission for Briggs in a 765-page volume entirely about the BBC at war, albeit strictly speaking *An American in England* was a CBS production^o using BBC facilities and predominantly BBC personnel. The unmistakeable John Snagge, for example, was the announcer. The narrator, Corwin's *alter ego*, was the American actor Joseph Julian.

The nine instalments were "London by Clipper", August 3 1942; "London to Dover", August 10 1942; "Ration Island", August 17 1942; "Women of Britain", August 24 1942; "The Yanks are Here", August 31 1942; "An Anglo-American Angle", September 1 1942; "Cromer", December 1 1942; "Home is Where You Hang Your Helmet", December 8 1942; and "Clipper Home" December 22 1942. Martin Grams explains the reason for the long gap between instalments six and seven:

The premiere broadcast, August 3, was actually a rebroadcast after shortwave interference interrupted transmission of the premiere performance on July 27. Shortwave interference made reception in the United States impossible for the sixth episode and prompted a network decision to complete the series in the Stateside studios of CBS rather than have them originate from England.

[Grams 2000: 26-27]

The sixth episode, "An Anglo-American Angle", was redone with American actors and broadcast on December 15.

These are not plays as radio audiences had come to know plays before 1942, nor are they large-scale pageants like *We Hold These Truths*. They are through-written by a playwright and performed by actors yet they sound like documentaries. They are sham reportage, monologues in which Julian voices Corwin's thoughts against a background of stock characters like hotel doormen and clippies on a London bus. Corwin doesn't disguise the artifice but celebrates it with clever dramatic devices. For example, in "London by Clipper", "Joe" is considering the British character on the flight over:

ⁿ Time Zones prevented simultaneous broadcasts. The live version was performed at the Maida Vale studios at 4am British time, 10pm the previous evening US time.

^o Produced by Edward R Murrow.

JOE: No question about it – they’re a cool bunch. Why, if the world were to come to an end at three tomorrow afternoon, they’d wait until the regular six o’clock broadcast and go on as usual...

NEWS: This is London calling. Here is the news, and this is John Snagge reading it. The world came to an end at two minutes after three this afternoon, during a debate in the House of Commons. A summary of the debate will be given at the end of this bulletin.

[Barnouw 1945: 211]

Bridson had no doubts as to the significance of Corwin’s visit, describing *An American in England* as “a sheer delight to everyone who believed in radio writing as a creative art.”³⁶ Certainly the series influenced Bridson’s own work during a prolonged visit to America and Canada in 1943. Equally its echoes are found everywhere in a dramatic feature that even Gielgud regarded highly enough to claim a share in, Cecil McGivern’s *Junction X*.

7.6 Case study: “Junction X” (1944)

Cecil McGivern’s *Junction X* was broadcast twice in the first half of 1944, on Friday March 24 and again on Friday May 5. The May broadcast was specifically listed, in parentheses, as “recording”,³⁷ the first time a play discussed here has been so described. Seán Street’s history of radio recording techniques in the online *Sound Journal*³⁸ demonstrates that recording was a tool of features long before it was used in drama, presumably because features were seen as being more akin to reportage than to theatre. Street describes Gilliam’s use of direct disc recording mounted in a Morris van as early as March 1935³⁹. The first Philips-Miller tape machines had been installed at Broadcasting House in 1939 but soon became redundant when the German invasion of Holland cut off supplies of tape; discs were used for short items although the BBC was experimenting with long-play technology for recording music, thus the most likely medium for the *Junction X* would seem to be the Blattnerphone steel tape system,^p which the BBC had been using since 1929.⁴⁰ Such recordings were not primarily intended for repeats, which the BBC still shied away from, but to enable programmes to be broadcast on the Empire Service to a multitude of time-zones.

^p More recently the Marconi-Stille system.

Blattnerphone recordings were notorious for the hiss on the tape,⁹ more so than the direct disc recordings (Watts system) used for classical music, but were considered acceptable for the spoken word. By 1944 the spoken word would need to be considered unusually important to warrant the expense of £20 per fifteen-minute reel.⁴¹ That *Junction X* was recorded for repeat purposes was unusual but its publication in pamphlet form by the War Office in June 1944 was unprecedented. Clearly, McGivern's feature was always intended to be a significant contribution to the war effort.

McGivern was a significant figure at the BBC. He had been Programme Director in his native Northeast before moving to London to work on a series of war-related features including *The Harbour Called Mulberry* and *The Battle of Britain*. Although he was not a playwright in the usual sense he was nominated for an Academy Award for his contribution to the script of David Lean's *Great Expectations* (1946). In 1947 he joined BBC Television and was Deputy Director by 1957.

Gielgud claims an unlikely hand in *The Air is Our Concern*, about the air industry, "and in *Junction X*, which paid a deserved tribute to the wartime effort of British railways."⁴² It was not hard to make heroes out of airmen, soldiers and sailors but it took someone with a special gift to celebrate the protected workers of the rail industry. McGivern encapsulates his theme by dedicating the transcript to "The Railwaymen of Great Britain – Front Line Fighters."⁴³

Junction X is not a documentary in the modern sense of apparent actuality and minimal artifice. It is, however, within the British film documentary tradition of the 1930s and early 1940s, particularly the work of Humphrey Jennings and Harry Watt. Wartime "documentaries" from the Crown Film Unit restaged actual events (Jennings' *Fires Were Started* (1943)) or dramatised general military action (Watt's *Target For Tonight* (1941)) without being specific.⁴⁴ All McGivern's wartime features of necessity follow the dramatisation model; everything he was describing – including the way the railways worked – was sensitive in time of war. He says in his preface to *Junction X*, "Much of what I had seen could not be mentioned – and a great deal of information I had to discard."⁴⁵

⁹ And the 'plop' of soldered edits [Smithers 1938: 44-45]

McGivern researched his feature by travelling around the rail network for sixteen days' "field-work." He talked to railworkers at all levels yet none of their words are carried directly into his script. McGivern's dialogue is stylised, subservient to his theme. His characters are fictional; he uses actors from the repertory, whose voices listeners would surely recognise. The piece was recorded in the studio, complete with orchestra, and all the railway sounds are sound effects. *Junction X* has the elements of a play – and a fairly modernist one at that - yet it is not a play, because it has no plot and no character development. It is an impression, an arena for the interplay of ideas, the medium for the transmission of McGivern's message.

He begins with straightforward narration, recounting how the four rail companies had planned for war. Then, bizarrely, the Narrator and the Listener start a conversation. The Narrator wants his audience to close its eyes, imagine the scene, but the Listener angrily interrupts: "Oh, for God's sake, man! ... Your silly play-acting! Close your eyes! In imagination! There's a blitz on down here. And my imagination's travelling only in one direction."⁴⁶ We hear the "frightening din of the air raid". The Narrator can take away these sounds. "Let's take away some of the noise – take away the bombs and aircraft--- (*They are taken away.*) Hear anything now? ... No? Then cut out the explosions and the bells and the crash of buildings." Soon we are left with "the distant familiar whistle of a shunting engine."⁴⁷ This comforts the Listener. The Narrator tells him, "Well, it's eased your nerves, hasn't it? Brought back a feeling of normality." *Junction X* is Home Front propaganda, its tone reassuring, its message one of "situation normal".

The Listener pacified, the Narrator takes a God's eye view through darkness, dawn and full light, all the transitions set to music.

Dawn ... The points and flashes of coloured lights are vanishing ... and out of the shadows emerge movement and solid shapes. ... The dim outlines of passenger trains, moving from station to station... [McGivern 1944: 10]

The Listener finds himself at Junction X for the morning rush hour. He greets his friends, Smith and Brown. The Narrator is still there, still actively exhorting the Listener to look around. He guides the Listener to the Divisional Superintendent's office, to eavesdrop on that morning's telephone conference with "Headquarters near

London”.⁴⁸ The conference is done naturalistically, punching out facts and figures to give an indication of the size of the undertaking – “12,642 upline wagons waiting to be cleared”, “Fifty upline trains alive”, “The labour problem’s acute, sir ... One hundred thousand railway men in the forces...”⁴⁹ The characters have names now, Boyle, Fairbank and Ransome, to signal that this is real information. Divisional Superintendent Fairbank nevertheless opts out of reality to hammer home the point to the Narrator:

This war ... It’s a war of materials – and nobody realises that better than railwaymen. The stuff – it’s amazing – staggering. Pouring out of factories, out of America and Canada – mountains of it – and we’ve got to handle it...

[McGivern 1944: 18]

A major convoy has been diverted through Junction X, throwing Fairbank’s schedule into chaos, and by extension the whole of the rest of the network. The Narrator explains: “The eyes in the Control Office never leave the maps. The phones are never silent. The ripples are spreading. Not slowly like those in a pond – but spreading at 30—40—50—60 miles an hour!”⁵⁰ Naturally, arrangements are made and the Narrator and Listener follow the convoy to the railway-owned docks.

By 8.30 in the evening, the Narrator and Listener are on a bridge overlooking Junction X, chatting to the Station Master who recalls, in flashback, the evacuations of September 1 1939. “All I know is that I became a wet nurse for what seemed half the babies in Britain, and in two days you couldn’t find a single bottle – or a teat – in this town for love nor money.”⁵¹ McGivern jump cuts to Mr X of the Southern Railway being told by the War Office:

This is Tuesday, May 21st, 1940 – a date, I think, which will figure largely in your memoirs if you should write them ... It is almost certain that within the next few days the British Expeditionary Force will be evacuated from France.

[McGivern 1944: 35]

In a second flashback the Station Master narrates the dispersal of the evacuees from Dunkirk. “It took 186 trains, not 150 – and they never stopped for nine and a half days; 323,000 men they took away from the ports...”⁵²

Returning to the present, the Narrator escorts the Listener to a signal box ten miles up the line and two retired signalmen, “back to help out”. A German fighter dives

towards them, guns blazing. “Jerry” drops a bomb on the line. He misses but blows impassable debris across the line.

Lines covered with soil and rock – and fifteen miles away, racing towards it, the first of the troop specials. Come on, Mr Listener. Ready for a footplate journey?

[McGivern 1944: 45]

With the instantaneousness that only radio can do, the Narrator is on the footplate of Engine 2574 as it “rocks and sways and jerks”. For a minute, nearly two, it is pure narration: “The fireman seizes a hose and sprays the coal in the chute, the dusty floor and the sides of the cab...”⁵³ Meanwhile, in simultaneous action, the Divisional Superintendent and his team realise the debris cannot be shifted in time – in dramatic terms a cliffhanger, but this is not drama in the normal sense. Far from saving the day by some heroic act, the signalman at Middleton simply stops the train and tells the driver to go round the loop. McGivern is consciously playing with the audience’s expectations. Through the Narrator, he explains:

A little flat, isn’t it, Mr Listener? Not quite enough excitement in that, is there? Well – this isn’t a thriller. Railway practice doesn’t include desperate rescues in the nick of time.

[McGivern 1944: 52]

As propaganda, *Junction X* is remarkably effective. What it is in terms of drama and/or reportage is more complex. It is not a documentary and does not claim to be. McGivern calls it a ‘dramatisation’ and yet it is not a fully-fledged drama because it contains no narrative or character development. Even so, he is a virtuoso of dramatic tropes and techniques – a sharply defined three-act structure (today, yesterday and tonight), suspense, flashbacks, simultaneous action and, throughout the sixty minutes an over-arching celebration of artifice in the dialogue between the Narrator and the Listener. Many if not all of these devices were outside the range of the Drama Department proper in 1944, thus McGivern’s work for Features prefigured a postwar return to experimentalism in British radio drama.

7.7 Conclusions

The war literally broke the mould of BBC radio drama. Having initially driven drama from the schedules, the need to bolster public morale and, to a lesser extent, to disseminate propaganda, spawned new dramatic forms, namely themed series, serials, soaps and fully-fledged drama documentaries. All of these would survive in postwar programming.

American entry into the war also impacted on radio drama. The most feted writer in the CBS stable, Norman Corwin, influenced the development of British radio drama with his London-based series *An American in England*. McGivern's *Junction X* derives directly from the Corwin model and is one of the few BBC productions known to have played a significant role in the national war effort. Not only was the text printed by the War Office and sold on railway stations but the production was recognised by colleagues as a major artistic achievement. Stuart Hibberd, for example, one of the original BBC announcers, wrote in his memoirs:

On Saturday, 5th May, I listened to Cecil McGivern's superb programme on the work of Britain's railways, called 'Junction X'. If ever an Oscar is awarded for an outstanding Radio production 'Junction X' should surely have first claim. It is undoubtedly the finest documentary piece of Radio ever conceived.

[Hibberd 1950: 251]

The audience for drama doubled between 1939 and 1945⁵⁴ but the airtime available grew only marginally. There was little if any drama on the Forces Network. By 1944 Plays comprised nearly 5% of the Home Service – with Features another 2% - but, to put this in its proportion, *Children's Hour* alone was 4% of all broadcasting.⁵⁵ On balance, though, the conclusion has to be that radio drama increased in importance during the war years thereby increasing its audience, expanded its repertoire by assimilating new forms, and advanced its dramatic technique, largely through the work of the Features wing but also in the realm of through-written series. Overall, Gilliam eclipsed Gielgud over the six war years and it was Features that was chosen to mark the ultimate victory with *Their Finest Hour*.⁵⁶ In July 1945 Gilliam got his reward – formal separation from Gielgud's empire.

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- ³ Briggs 1970: 29
- ⁴ R J E Silvey, "Radio audience research in Great Britain", in Lazarsfeld and Stanton (1944), p. 172
- ⁵ Gielgud 1957: 99
- ⁶ *Ibid*, p. 15
- ⁷ Lloyd & Vinogradoff 1940:193
- ⁸ Briggs 1970: 113
- ⁹ Briggs 1970: 100
- ¹⁰ Dane 1942: 2
- ¹¹ Dane 1942: 10
- ¹² Dane 1942: 10
- ¹³ Dane 1942: 11
- ¹⁴ Dane 1942: 22
- ¹⁵ Sayers 1943: 124
- ¹⁶ Sayers 1943: 9
- ¹⁷ Donald A Low, "Telling the Story: Susan Hill and Dorothy L Sayers", in Drakakis (1981), p. 130
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 134
- ¹⁹ Williamson 1944: 8
- ²⁰ Sayers 1943: 311
- ²¹ Sayers 1943: 293
- ²² Sayers 1943: 77
- ²³ Briggs 1970: 630
- ²⁴ Gielgud 1957: 101
- ²⁵ Linklater 1942: 91
- ²⁶ Linklater 1942: 97
- ²⁷ Linklater 1942: 106
- ²⁸ Linklater 1942: 8
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- ³⁰ Linklater 1942: 47
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- ³⁵ Rudolf Arnheim, "The World of the daytime serial" in Lazarsfeld and Stanton 1944: 83
- ³⁶ Bridson 1971: 94
- ³⁷ *The Times*, Friday May 5 1944, pg 6
- ³⁸ Seán Street (2002) "Recording Technologies and Strategies for British Radio Transmission Before the 2nd World War", <http://www.ukc.ac.uk/sd/fya/sound-journal-street-02-01-02>
- ³⁹ *Ibid*, 3.11
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 2.5
- ⁴¹ *Ibid*, 5.3
- ⁴² Gielgud 1957: 105
- ⁴³ McGivern 1944: 56
- ⁴⁴ British Film Institute, www.screenonline.org.uk
- ⁴⁵ McGivern 1944: 6
- ⁴⁶ McGivern 1944: 9
- ⁴⁷ McGivern 1944: 10
- ⁴⁸ McGivern 1944: 16
- ⁴⁹ McGivern 1944: 17
- ⁵⁰ McGivern 1944: 24

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- ⁵¹ McGivern 1944: 34
⁵² McGivern 1944: 38
⁵³ McGivern 1944: 49
⁵⁴ Briggs 1970: 46
⁵⁵ Briggs 1970: 586-587
⁵⁶ Briggs 1970: 711

Chapter 8: The poetic form

8.1 Introduction

On the face of it, separating Drama and Features required a simple distinction between fiction and actuality. In practice, however, all forward-looking dramatic writing found a postwar home in Gilliam's department, primarily because of Gilliam's new deputy, Bridson.^a

Bridson was the true genius of radio drama's most original form. His prodigious output covered everything from travelogues to state occasions, Christmas specials to the Space Race. Over the course of his thirty-five year career he claimed that "Over eight hundred programmes had had my name upon them ... and four hundred had been heard in recorded repeats."¹ In amongst that eight hundred was something like thirty verse plays, a form he seems largely to have invented.^b

Other, more famous poets wrote plays for the Features Department, notably Edward Sackville-West, Louis MacNeice and Dylan Thomas. Although *Under Milk Wood* was written for the Third Programme, Sackville-West's *The Rescue*, MacNeice's *Christopher Columbus* and *The Dark Tower*, and all Bridson's verse plays including his last original masterwork *The Christmas Child* were written for the Home Service, jostling for airtime with the populist fare of *Saturday Night Theatre*.^c

Under Milk Wood is inarguably the best-known radio play in verse but is not really a play and remains, of course, forever unfinished. The case study in this chapter is

^a In 1971 Bridson told the *Guardian*'s John Hall, "What made radio great in its best days was Laurence Gilliam and a department under him dedicated to promoting creative writing. That department came up with *Under Milk Wood*, MacNeice's *Dark Tower* and *Christopher Columbus*, and marvellous scripts from people like Henry Reed, and productions from people like Douglas Cleverdon. In those days you listened to the Third Programme because, if you didn't, you thought you were getting out of touch with literature." John Hall, "High points on the medium wave", *Guardian*, January 20 1971 pg 8.

^b Archibald MacLeish wrote the first US verse play for radio, *The Fall of the City* (see Chapter 4) and in the introduction he cites Bridson as a precursor: "The British Broadcasting Corporation has presented a few verse plays written expressly for radio and one of them, Geoffrey Bridson's *March of the '45*, is said to have been both interesting and exciting." (MacLeish 1937: 7)

^c See Chapter 8.

therefore R C Scriven's *A Single Taper* (1948), a truly visceral example of what can be achieved in the currently outmoded form of radio verse drama.

8.2 "The Rescue"

Sackville-West was an aristocrat,^d a music critic, and a fringe member of the Bloomsbury Set. His sole radio play – broadcast, in John Burrell's production, in two parts on the evenings of November 25 and 26 1943 – enjoyed music by Benjamin Britten and, in the printed version, illustrations by Henry Moore.

In his "Preamble" Sackville-West immediately stakes a claim to the experimental high ground.

Experiments with the microphone for dramatic purposes have been going on for long enough to have produced attempts at some form of radio-opera or music-drama. So far as England is concerned, however, such attempts, if any, have not been very thorough-going or imaginative... [Sackville-West 1945: 7-8]

He describes his play as a melodrama in the traditional sense of a drama incorporating music.² Indeed, one of his experiments is the use of music in place of sound effects: "With a very few important exceptions (trains, cars, doors opening and shutting, and the like) there are no sound effects which cannot be rendered 'on the air' with incomparably greater imaginative accuracy by music."³ Thus "the intermittent whirr of a wooden rattle" denotes the presence and inner thoughts of the "sinister clown" Irus.⁴

Sackville-West uses verse as heightened speech for gods and songs and soliloquy, otherwise his characters speak prose. This is not in itself experimental because that was the method of the Greek tragedians and what Sackville-West is effectively doing is turning the last part of Homer's *Odyssey* into the classical tragedy that never was. Where he differs from the Greek model is in the recognition that radio offers new ways of achieving dramatic impact. As he puts it, "Radio is capable of carrying far more

^d The 5th Baron Sackville.

8.3 Louis MacNeice – “Christopher Columbus” and “The Dark Tower”

Columbus^f was MacNeice’s first radio play. Prior to joining the BBC in 1941 he was “like most of the intelligentsia, prejudiced not only against that institution but against broadcasting in general.”⁷ A year later, his disdain did not prevent him accepting what, on the face of it, was hackwork, knocking up a programme to mark the 450th anniversary of Columbus’s voyage. MacNeice certainly made the project something more substantial, albeit he completely lost the celebratory aspect. His Columbus, for example, is oddly messianic:

I am Christopher, the Bearer of Christ,
I am the Dove that travels the world,
And the words that I speak are the words that I hear
And the words that I hear are the words of God.
I am the last Apostle. [MacNeice 1944: 31]

He instantly alerts the listener to the fact that what follows will not be constrained by reality. He begins with a dialogue between the Voice of Doubt and the Voice of Faith and their respective choruses, reminiscent of gods arguing before a Greek tragedy.⁸

MacNeice was still lecturing in America when *The Fall of the City* aired in 1937 and makes a clear acknowledgement of MacLeish’s influence when the Observer reports---

Today... Today... Today!
The most wonderful day in our history.
From where I stand on the top of this turret
The whole of this city of Granada is a sea of sound and colour---
[MacNeice 1944: 51]

Similarly, when Columbus returns with news of his discoveries:

And look at who comes here – the Discoverer himself,
The man who is now the talk of Europe, the Very Magnificent Lord
Admiral of the Ocean Sea, Viceroy of the Western World...
[MacNeice 1944: 82]

^f Home Service, October 12 1942

⁸ In an interesting inversion of the roles for which they were then known, Robert Speaight was Doubt and Marius Goring Faith.

In his notes MacNeice explains why he included Beatriz Enríquez, mother of Columbus's son Fernando Colon. "I introduced her not to modify but to emphasise her lover's single-mindedness."⁸ During the voyage, this single-mindedness borders on schizophrenia as Columbus both writes in his journal and soliloquises.

"September the sixth: Cleared from the Canaries and sailed due west."
[MacNeice 1944: 66]

They knew I was to come.
Isiah and Esdras and Job and John the Divine---
They knew I was to come. [MacNeice 1944: 67]

Now, instead of choruses, Faith and Doubt have echoes:

Faith: You shall achieve what you have designed---
Echo: you have designed---
Doubt: The steed you are riding is doomed to fall---
Echo: doomed to fall---
[MacNeice 1944: 69]

On the return, Columbus's followers chant "in the manner of a round"⁹ as he rides past Beatriz's door without so much as a sideways glance. Rounds and choruses with or without echoes are all literary devices serving only to browbeat the listener with the playwright's virtuosity. After building a reputation in the minority art of poetry MacNeice clearly found difficulty in adapting to a mass medium.

This synthetic figure of the ordinary listener tends to become a bugbear to radio writers and producers; it would be very natural to draw the inference that to hold the attention of this listener a writer has got to 'write down'. (By writing down I mean pandering – writing by standards which the writer considers low.) This inference would be false. Radio writing must, in the majority of cases, be popular; it need not ever be vulgar. [MacNeice 1944: 9]

His other major verse play, *The Dark Tower*,^h sets a more sensitive subject in a more difficult form. The theme is the perennial need for young men to die fighting against the forces of Evil, something most of his listeners had faced twice in their lifetime, and MacNeice acknowledges the rawness of that wound barely seven months into the peace, by writing an allegory. "*The Dark Tower* is a parable play, belonging to that wide class of writings which includes *Everyman*, *The Faerie Queene* and *The Pilgrim's Progress*."¹⁰

^h Home Service, January 21 1946.

It is also a continuation, as MacNeice explains in a short opening announcement, of Browning's poem *Child Roland*. There is no need for the listener to be familiar with the poem; MacNeice tells us all we need to know, which is that the poem ends with "*a challenge blown on a trumpeter*".¹¹ The play starts with what seems like that challenge. In fact it is young Roland's older brother Gavin practicing the challenge for the Sergeant-Trumpeter. Roland has already lost his father and six brothers to the Dragon of the Dark Tower. His tutor explains:

We call it the Dragon for short, it is a nameless force
Hard to define – for no one who has seen it,
Apart from those who have seen its handiwork,
Has returned to give an account of it.
All that we know is there is something there
Which makes the Dark Tower dark and is the source
Of evil through the world. [MacNeice 1947: 27]

The language is noticeably simpler than that of *Columbus*, partly because it is a play about the young, but chiefly because simplicity offsets the complexity of the allegory.

Roland is his mother's last son and the Sergeant-Trumpeter's last cadet. When he is older, and the time approaches for him to make his challenge, Roland is sceptical about the Dragon. The Sergeant-Trumpeter sends him to Blind Peter. Peter blinded himself when his baby daughter died. In those days, Peter tells Roland, the Dragon was creeping around, purely because no one had been to the Dark Tower to challenge him.

...nobody saw him of course,
There was just a kind of a bad smell in the air
And everything went sour. [MacNeice 1947: 33]

A new government had been elected.

They passed a pack of laws forbidding this and that
And anyone breaking 'em – the penalty was death.
[MacNeice 1947: 33]

The parallel in 1946 was with pre-war Germany and perhaps postwar Russia, but MacNeice has aimed for and achieved universality.

Roland's girlfriend Sylvie has no time for "out of date beliefs and mock heroics."¹² She seeks to keep Roland from his destiny by marrying him but when, in one of the play's most effective scenes, the priest asks if anyone knows of any "just cause or

impediment”, voices from Roland’s past – his father, Gavin and Blind Peter – chime in, “I do! I do! I do!”¹³

Roland presses on into the forest. MacNeice builds the tension by introducing the Voice of a Clock, “Tick Tock,”¹⁴ no doubt echoed in Benjamin Britten’s music, mimicking Roland’s pounding heartbeat. We are reminded that we are in a wholly allegorical forest when Roland stumbles on a carved stone bearing the moral of MacNeice’s parable:

To Those Who Did Not Go Back---
Whose Bones being Nowhere, their signature is for All Men---
Who went to their Death of their Own Free Will
Bequeathing Free Will to Others. [MacNeice 1947: 60]

Roland is urged on by the voices of children yet to be born. The ghosts of those who have gone before stiffen his resolve. Roland sees no tower.

GAVIN: That fooled *me*, Roland my brother.
FATHER: Look over there, Roland my son.
ROLAND: Where? ... Oh *that* little thing?
Like a wart growing out of the ground!
FATHER: It’s growing, Roland, it’s growing. [MacNeice 1947: 65]

MacNeice considered *The Dark Tower* “the best radio script I have done.”¹⁵ Without doubt it is a better play than *Christopher Columbus*. In allegory or parables motivation tends to be taken for granted; the hero is tempted but ultimately completes his mission. *The Dark Tower* is therefore freed from the constraints of character-driven narrative and revels in being idea-driven – the same way, but much more effectively, that Linklater’s plays were idea-driven.

The problem comes when not everyone recognises the driving idea. MacNeice acknowledges the fact: “Many listeners said that they enjoyed it, found it ‘beautiful’, ‘exciting’ etc. – but had no idea what it was about.” In that respect it is fascinating to compare *The Dark Tower* with Bridson’s *The Christmas Child*, another verse play of the early nuclear age.

8.4 “The Christmas Child”

Bridson had spent much of 1943 in North America. *Canada at War* was a collaboration with CBC’s Gerald Noxon and with NBC Bridson created what was to become a personal series of occasional features, *An Englishman looks at Chicago* and *An Englishman looks at San Francisco*. The acknowledgement of Corwin is implicit in the title. Bridson’s last US production in 1943, *The Man who went to War*, was “radio’s first ballad-opera”¹⁶, a collaboration with the black left-wing poet Langston Hughes, with folk music collected by Alan Lomax and performed by an all black cast. The play was only broadcast in the UK because “union rates prevented its being carried by an American network for less than about ten times the money we could afford to pay.”¹⁷ In a footnote, Bridson adds, “the recording was promptly destroyed after its second broadcast by some fool of a BBC administrator who decided it was too expensive at £500!”¹⁸

Bridson’s British ballad-opera was *Johnny Miner*, with folk music compiled by A L Lloyd.ⁱ Only choruses are included in *The Christmas Child* collection, and the choruses are neither great poetry nor great drama. The next Christmas, however, *Johnny Miner* made a cameo appearance in Bridson’s last masterpiece.

On the face of it, *The Christmas Child*^j is a contemporary nativity play set in Oldham. The contemporary nativity, it can be argued, dates back at least as far as *The Second Shepherd’s Play* of the Towneley Cycle compiled in the mid fifteenth century. What makes Bridson’s update especially effective is his social conscience.

The play begins normally enough. Mary’s cousin Lizzie has come to visit with her husband Zachary. Mrs Platt is keeping an eye on their three-month-old, Johnny. Mary and Joe are hoping to move when their child comes; not a flight into Egypt but to a council estate. While Joe walks Lizzie and Zachary to the end of the street, the tone changes. The baby has somehow been born, though we are given no clue how or when, and Tom Shepherd calls to pay his respects with his mates Billy Spinner and Johnny

ⁱ Home Service, December 23 1947.

^j Home Service, December 18 1948.

Miner. Mary's baby reminds Billy of the son he lost fifteen years earlier, during the Depression.

Malnutrition was what they called it,---
Slow starvation, that's what it meant....
Food cost money and money was scarce. [Bridson 1950: 215]

Miner's son was killed in a pit accident, Shepherd's son in the RAF. Mary begins to recognise the parallel with the original Mary – that perhaps her son will grow up to change the world. The Statesman, the local MP, arrives with a Sociologist and an Economist. They bring gifts. The Economist brings state-supported trade, "A placing of need before advantage"¹⁹, the Sociologist the will to cast off "Our prejudices and privileges"²⁰, the Statesman "A world with all the frontiers gone".²¹ Then the front door bursts open. In rushes not the person but the *voice* of Herod: Herod as the Voice of the Future, the voice of the atom bomb.^k Like the ARP Warden in *Aaron's Field*, Herod speaks prose:

This is the Voice of the Future.... Here is the News. A new type of Atomic Bomb has now been perfected which it is confidently predicted will revolutionise modern warfare. Although a million times more powerful than those employed at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there is every reason to believe that even greater advances in bomb research will be made within the next twelve months. [Bridson 1950: 223]

Of course, it is only a dream. Mary's labour begins. Lizzie returns to take charge.

JOE: Mary, love....! What the heck's the matter....?
Oh, this is *AWFUL*....!!! What can I *DO*....???
LIZZIE: You can shut your trap, Joe Winterbottom....!
Nothing's likely to happen to you....!
It's Mary *havin'* the child, y' know....!
I'll put her to bed. You make the tea. [Bridson 1950: 226]

Only Bridson could do North Country comedy in metre that scans. Indeed, only Bridson up to that point had linked verse drama with either comedy or recognisable real life. He sets out neither to impress nor educate but simply to communicate. Sackville-West took his story from Homer but Bridson took the technique of the ancient bards

^k "This play was begun in 1939, but left unfinished until 1948. Originally, the Voice of Herod was to have been supplied by one of Hitler's wartime broadcasts. In its present form it is perhaps even more depressing." [Bridson 1950: 240]

who used metrical rhythm and slightly heightened language to carry their audience into the narrative. He outlined his aim in the Foreword to *The Christmas Child*:

Obviously enough, if broadcast poetry is to succeed in winning and holding its potential audience, it must succeed by reason of its suitability to the medium. It must succeed, as spoken poetry originally did, by its immediate impact on the listener in a first and probably only hearing. [Bridson 1950: 9]

8.5 Case study: “A Single Taper” (1948)

Whilst *Under Milk Wood* has entered the curriculum, R C Scriven’s *A Single Taper*¹ is almost completely forgotten. Yet surely no verse play better exemplifies Bridson’s aim of medium compatibility and instant impact. *A Single Taper* is without doubt the shortest play discussed in this study, covering barely 14 octavo pages, but like *A Comedy of Danger* it goes straight to the heart of the nature of radio drama – a blind play driven by internal monologue.

Superficially, *A Single Taper* is an account of an eye operation, conducted in real time and described from the patient’s point of view as he experiences it. The patient cannot have a general anaesthetic, we are told, because he will have to move his eye as instructed by the surgeon – with the trephine (a surgical boring tool) actually present in his eye. Even describing the action of the play is not for the squeamish. To hear it in a live dramatic format would have guaranteed instant empathy.

Albeit this is only Scriven’s second play,^m he eschews stage directions entirely, relying on the verse – or more precisely, the typography – to indicate character and phrasing. For example:

PATIENT: Whose finger pries
 my eyelid back?
 A finger cool, firm, dry,
 impersonal,
 exposing my lashless eye
 which quivers in apprehension

¹ March 31 1948, Home Service (North Region), repeated Third Programme, April 8 1948.

^m The first, *The Peacock City of the P’Tzan King*, was broadcast on North Region only on May 15 1947.

Something bright
glitters...
my eyeball winces...

NURSE: Now. Hold tight.
This will not hurt you. It is not the knife,
but drops:
cocaine [Scriven 1948: 8]

The Patient, understandably nervous, has no full stops whereas the Nurse is *all* full stops. The Patient's words quiver like his "lashless eye". The Nurse's diction, by contrast, embodies clipped, detached professionalism. Moments later, the Surgeon arrives with his Student. In a passage anyone who has been a hospital in-patient will recognise, they talk over the Patient as if he is not there.

STUDENT: I know the patient. He's a painter.
It seems hard luck. I don't know if you care
for pictures? This man's good.
It is worth while---
one of the things, I mean, which make your work
seem ... useful.
I'm case-hardened to them, now,
the people who crowd the clinic,
day after day,
the stupid, milling, pushing, greedy mob
servile, because they're frightened---
human junk:
I wouldn't patch them, were it left to me:
Sir, you agree? [Scriven 1948: 9]

Again, the typography provides all necessary performance information. Consider, for example, the world of ambiguity Scriven achieves by ending his second line with 'care'.

Then comes the central horror of the play, the truly visceral emotional connection between writer, actor and listener.

PATIENT: Into my sleeping eye
night-clouded now
the trephine sinks.
I feel its thin blade move
within my eyeball:
I feel the blade move... [Scriven 1948: 16]

Again demonstrating advanced dramatic technique Scriven leaves his short play unresolved. We do not know if the operation is a success. The Surgeon says it will be a week before they can test the Patient's reaction to light. The protagonist and therefore the listener is left wondering:

PATIENT: Dear Lord, let me guess---
when the sun's glowing furnace-bars
as the still candles of your stars
I have forgotten---
let me guess
a single taper in the night. [Scriven 1948: 19]

In fact, in Scriven's case the operation failed. After years of glaucoma, he lost his sight completely shortly before becoming a radio playwright. The original audience, of course, did not know this and was not told – the *Radio Times* of the period did not do profiles of new regional writers. Nor does Scriven wish the listener to know. It would have been easy enough, for example, to have the Nurse call the Patient "Ronald". He similarly keeps his fictional persona at one remove in the companion piece to *A Single Taper*, *The Inward Eye: Boy – 1913*.ⁿ Here, the Narrator (adult Robert) is split from the protagonist (his juvenile self, Bobby). The cast of characters is much larger but simply provides a backdrop to Robert's nostalgic reverie of a last boyhood holiday before the upheaval of World War I. Where *A Single Taper* was about sight or lack of it, *The Inward Eye* is about hearing, which Scriven lost completely aged 8. Where lesser writers would turn mawkish, Scriven makes a joke of the fading sense in a wonderful scene of gobbledegook set around his aunt's luncheon table.

ROBERT: Boredom...
with gibberish, flowing above one's head,
and, now and then, some fitful phrase or word
caught, prisoned in the mind's capricious,
fanciful ears
to be recalled, set free from long forgotten years...
JACK: Golla bee zon keet, ulla *Galloper Smith*?
GUEST: Diz a naw, *Asquith* shap eril teeg *Home Rule*.
MARGARET: *Asquith*? Darl zin gee *Suffragettes*! [Scriven 1945: 30]

In many ways *The Seasons of the Blind* (1968) is the continuation of *A Single Taper* in that, as Scriven wrote in the *Radio Times*, "I take one year of my own first crossing

ⁿ Third Programme November 11 1948, produced by Robert Gittings.

of the shadowy borderland between that country and the land of sight.”²² Michael Hordern continued as Scriven’s narrator/persona and the thematic link is acknowledged in the first speech:

Sleepless at midnight,
dreaming,
I thought the snowflowers burned
the purest of all candles...

[Scriven 1974: 151]

Seasons of the Blind, however, is an old-style dramatic feature in verse with emblems or concepts (Night, Summer, Autumn) in place of characters. *A Single Taper* and *The Inward Eye* are true plays with structure, characterisation and narrative development. The verse is integral and, for all its complexity, made to sound natural. For *A Single Taper* being constrained to fit into half of the half-hour weekly regional drama opt-out slot is turned into an advantage, an excruciating scenario reduced to its dramatic essence.

8.6 “Under Milk Wood”

Under Milk Wood is an anomaly: the only British radio play to have entered the curriculum, probably the only radio play most people would claim to have heard of, certainly the most revived and repeated radio play^o – and yet not really a play at all. Thomas himself conceived the project as a dramatic feature, telling the Welsh regional producer T Rowland Hughes, “What I have in mind, of course, is something on the lines of Bridson’s *March of the ’45* or MacLeish’s *The Fall of the City*...”²³ Twelve years later the feature had become an unfinished play, *The Village of the Mad*, out of which Thomas conceived something new:

Out of it came the idea that I write a piece, a play, an impression for voices, an entertainment out of the darkness of the town I live in, and to write it simply and warmly & comically with lots of movement and varieties of moods, so that, at many levels, through sight and speech, description & dialogue, evocation and parody, you come to know the town as an inhabitant of it.”²⁴

^o Peter Lewis lists its extraordinary broadcast history in “The radio road to Llareggub” [Drakakis 1981: 73], concluding, “no other radio play has received anything like the privileged treatment of multiple productions and multiple broadcasts that the BBC has bestowed on *Under Milk Wood*.”

The change is subtle but significant. The dramatic feature used drama to illustrate the theme, be it the Jacobite rebellion or the contribution of rail workers to the war effort; a play, on the other hand, finds its theme through the dramatic interplay of its characters. Having been so long in preparation, *Under Milk Wood* illustrates the step change by which the greater freedoms of the Third Programme put an end to the form developed by Bridson and Harding twenty years earlier.

What began as a feature turned into a play and then became something else. *Under Milk Wood* is both the last of the dramatic features and one of the first British examples of the pure radio play, a piece not hidebound by any conventions of the stage, liberated, not limited, by the absence of physicality.

Certainly the play's producer, Douglas Cleverdon – effectively the second author who assembled what became the canonical text from the dozens of drafts, notes and possible structures left by Thomas on his death – saw *Under Milk Wood* as part of the emerging radio literature being created, largely, by Henry Reed:^p

Untrammelled by the visual limitations of the small television screen, it can range from a close-up of the lizard in Henry Reed's *Streets of Pompeii* to the Spirits in Hardy's *Dynasts* [arranged for radio by Reed in six 90-minute episodes broadcast in June 1951] contemplating from the empyrean the crawling armies of Napoleon.²⁵

On the physical plane of *Under Milk Wood* very little happens: the villagers go about their daily round, sleep, work, eat, drink and sleep again; there is scarcely any interchange between them. But the internal, fantasized plane teems with action. Captain Cat dreams of drowned shipmates and his lost love, Rosie Probert; Myfanwy Price dreams of Mog Edwards, and Mog of Myfanwy; Polly Garter of "little Willy Wee". A character in a dramatic feature had no need of a back-story whereas the characters of *Under Milk Wood* are all back-story. A character in a dramatic feature had no use for an inner life whereas in *Under Milk Wood* the comedy in the scene between Mr and Mrs Pugh "over cold grey cottage pie" derives entirely from the contrast between outer submission and inner loathing.

^p See Chapter 10.

FIRST VOICE

Alone in the hissing laboratory of his wishes, Mr Pugh minces among bad vats and jeroboams, tiptoes through spinneys of murdering herbs, agony dancing in his crucibles, and mixes especially for Mrs Pugh a venomous porridge unknown to toxicologists which will scald and viper through her until her ears fall off like figs, her toes grow big and black as balloons, and steam comes screaming out of her navel.

MR PUGH

You know best, dear,

FIRST VOICE

says Mr Pugh, and quick as a flash he ducks her in rat soup.

[Thomas 1954: 63]

Paradoxically, the vestigial remains of the feature in *Under Milk Wood* are its most revered passages. The narration – and especially the “Voice of a Guide Book”, which gives us the only reality-based glimpse of Llareggub⁹ – are classic tropes of the form. The Voice of the Guide Book, however, is intrusive and serves no dramatic or poetic purpose; had Thomas lived to work on the production he would surely have cut it. The First Voice – which predominantly describes the outer world where the Second Voice guides us into the inner – is sometimes said to be in need of cutting. The first speech, lasting almost two pages, seems to unbalance the play, making it front-heavy. It has to be remembered, however, that *Under Milk Wood* is unfinished, the text we have a conflation of various drafts put together by Cleverdon. Had he lived, Thomas might well have written a matching passage for the end of the play, which certainly ends too curtly now. Interestingly, Cleverdon notes that for the Prix Italia, which *Under Milk Wood* won in 1954, the BBC edited the play down by more than a third, from 95 minutes to 60. It is unlikely, however, that the first speech was tampered with, because the First Voice was Richard Burton and Burton’s performance has become sacrosanct.

To mark the fiftieth anniversary of Thomas’s death in November 2003 BBC Wales mounted a new production for the *Saturday Play* slot,¹ which edited in Burton’s performance from the 1963 revival, digitally remastered. The result is slightly unsettling, not because it mixes the performance of a dead actor with those of living

⁹ ‘Llaregyb’ in the earliest published text, the Dent edition of January 1954. The play was first broadcast on the Third Programme on January 25 1954.

¹ Radio 4, November 15 2003, produced by Alison Hindell. This was also the first BBC drama production to be broadcast in surround sound.

actors,⁹ but because Burton's mannered reading has a deadening effect. Revivals of classic radio plays, it will be argued below, are something the BBC should do more often; but acting styles change and dramatic texts survive by being open to fresh interpretation. Over-reverence can easily end in irrelevance.

8.7 Conclusions

Although Bridson had invented radio verse drama as far back as 1935 and the last and best-known example would not be aired until 1954, the flowering of the form was in the period 1942 to 1948. *The Rescue*, *Christopher Columbus*, *The Dark Tower* and *The Christmas Child* all competed on equal terms with the more obvious audience-pleasers of *Saturday Night Theatre* and won audiences of many millions.

More importantly, these were plays at the cutting edge of new writing, as radical as anything showing on the London stage at the time. The high-minded MacNeice made no concessions to listeners unfamiliar with minority literary forms; Sackville-West came close to finding a *lingua franca* but squandered it, perhaps, on an ancient story with ancient preoccupations. Only Bridson, in *The Christmas Child*, managed to combine the poetic with the prosaic to encapsulate post war hopes and fears. R C Scriven, on the other hand, is unique because he made verse drama personal.

By 1954, however, all challenging new writing had been relegated to the new Third Programme. *Under Milk Wood* was very much in the tradition of Bridson with its contemporary setting and bucolic comedy, but for all its fame it was originally targeted at an audience less than a tenth the size of the audience for *The Dark Tower*.

The arrival of the Third Programme meant that drama on the Home Service lost its ambition. That is not to say that it went downmarket or became in MacNeice's term "vulgar", more that it was henceforth resolutely middle-of-the-road. It sought to cultivate and keep an audience that had never made a habit of the theatre but which had accepted film and radio drama at more or less the same time. It was the audience that would take up television but never entirely abandon radio or, indeed, the cinema. The

⁹ A gimmick previously used in film, e.g. *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid*.

audience that *would* be lost to television was the new audience being sought by serials and soap operas on the Light Programme.

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- ² Sackville-West 1945: 8
- ³ Sackville-West 1945: 10
- ⁴ Sackville-West 1945: 25-30
- ⁵ Sackville-West 1945: 8
- ⁶ Sackville-West 1945: 65
- ⁷ MacNeice 1947: 11
- ⁸ MacNeice 1944: 91
- ⁹ MacNeice: 1944: 83
- ¹⁰ MacNeice 1947: 21
- ¹¹ MacNeice 1947: 23
- ¹² MacNeice 1947: 35
- ¹³ MacNeice 1947: 54
- ¹⁴ MacNeice 1947: 58
- ¹⁵ MacNeice 1947: 9
- ¹⁶ Bridson 1971: 109
- ¹⁷ Bridson 1971: 110-111
- ¹⁸ Bridson 1971: 111n
- ¹⁹ Bridson 1971: 220
- ²⁰ Bridson 1971: 221
- ²¹ Bridson 1971: 222
- ²² Scriven 1974: 150
- ²³ Thomas to Hughes, November 4 1939, quoted in Cleverdon (1969), p. 2
- ²⁴ Letter to Countess Caetani, quoted in Cleverdon (1969) p. 20, and (1972) pp 6-7
- ²⁵ Introduction to the Folio Society edition of *Under Milk Wood* (1972), p. 3

Chapter 9: Gielgud's "Year of Grace"

9.1 Introduction

The story of British radio drama in the immediate aftermath of World War II is the story of Val Gielgud's fall from grace. In 1948 his position was so secure that he felt able to take a sabbatical year. By 1951, although he retained the title of Head of Drama (Sound) and would continue to do so until 1963, his stranglehold on broadcast drama had been broken.

Gielgud's animosity to American style soap opera and serials brought him into conflict with the Light Programme's first Controller, Maurice Gorham. When Gorham became Director of Television he refused to work with Gielgud. In 1948 Gorham attacked Gielgud in his memoirs and Gielgud responded in his account of his "Year of Grace".

At the same time Gielgud found himself peripherally caught up in Labour MP Geoffrey Cooper's attack on corruption at the BBC. Neither Gielgud nor his department was Cooper's target yet Gielgud could not resist biting back. His minor stage play *Party Manners* became a national scandal when Gielgud, having gained control of TV drama after all, aired it on the eve of the 1950 Labour Party conference.

The *Party Manners* affair marked the end of Gielgud's supremacy and the arrival of true plurality in drama across a three-channel BBC. Drama came to the daytime schedules for the first time as the BBC belatedly recognised niche audiences, women and teenagers. Never before had so much drama, of such a range, been available to audiences of such size.

9.2 Gielgud's "Considerations"

In June 1948 Gielgud produced his "Considerations relevant to Broadcast Drama based upon experience in the years 1929 to 1948"¹ detailing his view of the progress

radio drama had made since he took over from Jeffrey. This was a private document for internal circulation and Gielgud is willing to acknowledge shortcomings. First and foremost of these was the dearth of original scripts.

It must regretfully be admitted that in the field of original radio plays we have failed to discover more than a minimum of first rate work, and equally to establish any real school of pure radio dramatists.

Felix Felton makes the same point indirectly in his *The Radio Play: Its Technique and Possibilities* (1949). Felton, a long-serving member of Gielgud's department,^a confirms that in 1948-49 nearly all single plays on radio were adapted stage plays.

The Home Service presents a modern play every week in *Saturday Night Theatre*, and a classical dramatic masterpiece, such as the *Hippolytus*, *Doctor Faustus*, or *The School for Scandal* in *World Theatre* on the first Monday of each month. The Light Programme has currently a regular series *Curtain Up*, and there are generally at least two stage-plays every week in the Third Programme. [Felton 1949: 25]

The three plays in Ronald Flatteau's *Saturday Night Theatre* collection^b are all originals – *The Portsmouth Road* (Arthur Watkyn), *Mild and Bitter* (Philip Wade) and *Permanent Way* (Monkton Hoffe) – but the *BBC Year Book 1946* confirms that adaptations predominated.² Of the thirteen 1945 productions cited twelve are adaptations (albeit in some cases stage dramatisations of novels) and one a dramatisation of an often adapted novel.^c

The greatest progress, in Gielgud's view, had been in the technique of radio acting. Twenty years earlier, in "The Drama Studio",^d Jeffrey had argued that:

The really successful radio actor must be much more highly developed in expressiveness of voice and individuality than are our average stage artists. This development must be introspective rather than external, it must be the development of inward sincerity as against that which we know as theatrical effect.³

^a Felton wrote as a producer but his range as a radio actor is equally significant, from the Mayor of Toytown to Croak in Beckett's *Words and Music*.

^b *Three Plays Broadcast in 'Saturday Night Theatre'* (1947)

^c See Appendix 3.

^d See Chapter 3.

By 1948 acting standards had improved immeasurably, largely due to the establishment of the Repertory Company. Radio acting was now acknowledged as being different to stage acting and Gielgud defined the difference:

The actor on the stage is bound to be creating a picture a trifle more than life size for the benefit of a mass audience disposed in depth. The actor at the microphone should, on the other hand, be trying to compose a picture smaller than life size for the benefit of individual members of a far greater audience, each of whose members is for practical purposes at his elbow.

Interestingly, whilst Gielgud was unshakeable in his belief that having actors on open-ended contracts was a good thing, he took the opposite view of producers. In practice members of the Repertory Company came and went whereas producers tended to either stay forever, like Howard Rose, or leave after too short a time, like Cecil Lewis. Gielgud therefore suggested hiring producers “for a term of years rather than as members of the permanent staff... it would, I think, tend to a greater liveliness and vitality, apart from that regular infusion of fresh blood so important to any branch of creative entertainment.”

It may be that Gielgud, who described himself as “almost the last of the ‘diehards’” in that like the pioneers of Jeffrey’s day he still preferred to handle the mixing desk personally, considered that he too had become “a specialist in a *cul-de-sac*”, or it may have been that he saw his dominance being undermined by the new Light and Third Programmes. In any event in August 1948 he took a yearlong sabbatical, as he was entitled to do under the terms of his contract, with no firm commitment to return.

9.3 The Light Programme soap opera and serials

The Light Programme, which replaced the General Forces Programme on July 29 1945,⁴ offered British listeners what Paulu calls “a type of radio fare which the BBC previously had neglected.”⁵ Essentially, this was entertainment for entertainment’s sake, programming neither educational nor culturally improving.

The first Controller of the Light Programme was Maurice Gorham, who had followed Maschwitz, Gielgud and Gilliam at the *Radio Times*. In 1942-43 Gorham

visited the USA and was evidently inspired by the range of American broadcasting. On his return he was put in charge of the BBC's North American Service (home of *Front Line Family*) and in 1945 appointed to the Light. Gorham's vision was for popular programming in the American style, with comedy, popular music, light plays and, of course, daily serials. The latter inevitably led to conflict with Gielgud:

We clashed a good deal when he was in charge of the Light Programme: first, because he could not conceal his intention to Americanise it as far as he was able, a process which I thought both vulgar and stupid; secondly, he insisted on the soap opera as a permanent programme-item because it could be counted on to produce satisfactory listener research figures. [Gielgud 1965: 126-127]

However, after only a few months with the Light, Gorham was appointed Controller of Television. For Basil Nicolls, the Director of Home Broadcasting, it went without saying that Gielgud's brief as Head of Drama embraced TV as well as radio but Gorham flatly refused to have him.

I felt very strongly about it. If there is any professional aspect to radio drama it surely consists in skill at presenting plays in sound alone. Television drama is as different from radio drama as radio drama is different from the theatre or the films. It seemed to me absurd to say that radio-drama experts could take it in their stride. [Gorham 1948: 178]

The snub would have rankled with Gielgud had it stayed within the BBC but in 1947 the mercurial Gorham walked out of his post and the following year published a memoir, *Sound and Fury*, enshrining his opinion of Gielgud in print. A copy was sent to Gielgud in New York, where he spent much of his 'Year of Grace'. In his subsequent 'fragment of autobiography', he attacked Gorham as "a self-confessed believer in Listener Research"⁶ and – a far worse insult in the years of British postwar austerity – as pro-American. "I considered *The Robinsons* to be an *ersatz* American importation. I thought it vulgar, and I thought it dull."⁷ He went on, "In short, I believe Gorham's notion of successful broadcasting was that of successful *American* broadcasting."⁸

The first British radio soaps are often confused with each other. The family in Alan Melville's *Front Line Family* was called the Robinsons and *Front Line Family* continued as *The Robinson Family* when the war ended.⁹ This, clearly, is the soap

⁹ Even during the war the titles seem to have been interchangeable. There is a note in the BBC Written Archives at Caversham regarding episode 756, March 13 1944. "Sir Ian telephoned to say that he had been listening to the Robinson Family this morning (Front Line Family) between 8.30 and 8.45, and

Gielgud referred to in 1950. However, what Gielgud identified as the first of “this type of programme-item” in 1957⁹ was *The English Family Robinson* (1938) by Mabel and Denis Constanduros. Melville may have named his fictional family after the Constanduros characters; more likely both referenced the English literary sub-genre begun by Johann Wyss in 1813. *The English Family Robinson* was effectively an experiment in soap, running for twenty minutes on six successive Friday evenings.^f Whatever Gielgud may have thought of the experiment, it clearly was not demanding on resources. The same could not be said of *The Robinson Family* and when in 1946 Gorham’s successor Norman Collins proposed replacing it with a new daily serial, Gielgud protested to the Assistant Controller (Entertainment):

Collins says we must look forward to “living with his serial for some years”. In other words, we are letting ourselves in for a second “Robinson Family” with all that that implies: a commitment of indefinite duration.

I have already suggested to the Home Planners that I should drop the Saturday morning serial and I have indicated to Collins that in my view, however important it may be from the policy angle, “The Robinson Family” is proving a quite unreasonable burden from the staff point of view, considering its demands upon professional producing talent.¹⁰

Collins prevailed and the transition from *The Robinson Family* to *Mrs Dale’s Diary* in January 1948 was so seamless that two of the cast transferred – Ellis Powell as the eponymous Mrs Dale and Douglas Burbidge as her perpetually worrisome husband Jim.¹¹ *Dick Barton – Special Agent*⁸ was another Collins project. Although *Paul Temple* had been running since 1938 and Ernest Dudley’s *Dr Morelle* had launched in 1942 these were essentially literary detective serials in the classic British tradition of Holmes and Watson. The American tradition, derived from comic books and pulp fiction, was for adventure heroes like the Lone Ranger, the Green Hornet and Superman, who battled villains on an elemental, light-*versus*-dark scale. Barton was the first British attempt at an American-style superhero, with minimal back-story and only the sketchiest motivation – “not over-eager to settle down to a humdrum experience.”¹²

Maggie said she couldn’t hear the wireless during a raid in her air-raid shelter as it went off.” (WAC R34/275/2) Sir Ian was a member of the Board of Governors, almost certainly the blind governor Sir Ian Fraser (see Briggs 1979: 120).

^f October 7 to November 11 1938.

⁸ October 7 1946

The first series of twenty fifteen-minute episodes was literally twice as successful as *Mrs Dale*, with audiences of anything up to 16 million. A large proportion of that audience was made up of adolescent boys and thus an entirely new niche audience, which the writers responded to. For example, “The makers abandoned Barton’s girlfriend when Listener Research revealed that the core listeners were schoolboys.”¹³ Gielgud took a superficially tolerant view of *Barton* in his “Considerations”, before using it as platform to launch another attack on the soaps:

Though originally opposed to the idea of Dick Barton, I am inclined to believe that he can be justified as the modern equivalent of the Penny Blood which all nice boys used to read under the bedclothes. I can find no excuse for the preservation of ‘The Robinson Family’ or ‘Mrs Dale’s Diary’... Listeners to such programmes are not encouraged, in my belief, towards better examples of dramatic listening. It is simply a fact (*vide* Listener Research) that Wednesday Matinee has never been given a fair chance to establish itself owing to the rivalry on the alternative wavelength of a daily serial.¹⁴

Barton’s replacement in March 1951 was *The Archers*, which had begun in the Midlands Region in May 1950 but switched to the Light Programme under the aegis of the *Barton* team, producer Martyn C Webster and writers Edward J Mason and Geoffrey Webb. Even so, it never achieved much more than half the Barton audience.^h By this time American soaps and adventure series were migrating from radio to television. In their place the networks did what early, largely studio-bound television could not easily do. CBS did westerns, notably *Gunsmoke*, and NBC did science fiction, *X Minus One* and *Dimension X*.¹⁵ Significantly – and surely beyond coincidence – British radio did exactly the same. Charles Chilton wrote six series of *Riders of the Range* (1949-1953) mixing Wild West source material with songs from the Sons of the Saddle, and three series of *Journey into Space* (1953-56).

9.4 The single play on the Light Programme

Collins took a populist approach to the single play on the Light. Just as Gielgud had wanted to appeal to “the gallery”¹⁶ fifteen years earlier in order to whet their appetite for

^h 9.5 million by 1953 (Briggs 1979: 108)

more series drama, so Collins saw a progression from the Light to the Home and then on to the rarefied fare of the Third. Gielgud, however, again objected.

I believe it to be mistaken that successful productions in the World Theatre series should not be repeated several times on various wave lengths; and that the Light Programme's new *Curtain Up* series should not in fact be repeat performances of the Home Service's *Saturday Night Theatre* considering that the *genre* of the two series is precisely the same.¹⁷

Initially, Gielgud prevailed. Appendix 4 illustrates the exponential growth in the amount of radio drama in the immediate postwar period by comparing the drama available in a random week in 1947 with the drama available that same week in 1944. The new drama forms – serials and series – are on the Light Programme but, *Mystery Playhouse* notwithstanding, the only real play on the Light is indeed the repeat of *Saturday Night Theatre*. Clearly, before taking his sabbatical, Gielgud retained total control of the prestige product, the single play.

By 1954, however, the situation had reversed. Appendix 5 shows how little drama there now was on the Home Service and how much there now was on the Light. Whilst the *Curtain Up* slot was supposedly 'light' – in 1948 Director-General Haley had hoped to "keep the plays at a really good middle-brow standard"¹⁸ – there is little difference in 'seriousness' between the Home and the Light. If anything, the Home Service with adaptations of Wodehouse and Ian Hay, is probably lighter than the Light, although it is interesting that the *Monday Night Play* includes a Strindberg play, albeit a Strindberg fairytale rather than the sprawling symbolism of the Third Programme's repeated *To Damascus*. In terms of the Light Programme, Somerset Maugham was clearly a serious and substantial playwright and Carl Zuckmayer, probably better known for *The Captain from Köpenick* (1931), would probably be confined to Radio 3 today. Most significant, however, is the fact that *Radio Theatre*, half-hour plays written for radio, is on the Light Programme and in December 1954 features plays by the next generation of radio playwrights, John Mortimer and Giles Cooper.ⁱ

ⁱ Ironically, *Radio Theatre* had been the title of Gielgud's last collection of "plays specially written for broadcasting" in 1946.

Over a period of six years Gielgud's loss of authority was such that the Home Service was now repeating the Light Programme's productions of Shakespeare.^j He had escaped the worst of the *Caesar's Mistress* scandal, which cost the Chair and Vice-Chair of Governors their sinecures but, like an Aristotelian tragic hero, brought disaster upon himself by hubristically televising his spiteful political stage farce *Party Manners*.

9.5 "The BBC on Trial"

In March 1946 Wing-Commander Geoffrey Cooper, the newly-elected Labour MP for Middlesbrough, was approached by a number of ex-service entertainers and actors who were finding it virtually impossible to resume their broadcasting careers with the BBC. Cooper looked into the matter and concluded:

An onlooker like myself could only assume from all the evidence, as presented by one artiste after another, that the Corporation had a certain number of "pets" who were broadcasting continually, and that what gaps remained were filled by those who had stayed out of the war, for some reason – in some cases, understandably, a good one – and so they were better known to the producers than those who had been absent for several years.

[Cooper 1948: 16]

One actress "with extensive stage and film experience in this country and in the United States before the war", complained that in October 1948 Rita Vale appeared four times in the same week in different Drama Department productions:

This actress said it annoyed her because she knew that Rita Vale was the wife of Val Gielgud, the head of the BBC's Drama Section. However brilliant Rita Vale might be as a broadcasting artiste, four different shows in a week for the wife of the head of the Drama Section might appear to some people rather like partiality...

[Cooper 1948: 16]

Gielgud was by no means the only offender. His deputy Rose was married to another equally favoured actress, Barbara Couper, and Stanford Robinson, the BBC Opera Director, repeatedly featured his wife Loreley Dyer. In August 1946 Cooper passed thirty-three such complaints to Director-General Haley. Dissatisfied with Haley's reply, Cooper took signed statements from "a group of artistes whose high reputations and

^j Appendix 5c October 10.

abilities could not be denied” which “included serious allegations, of what I could only conclude looked dangerously like bribery, or to say the least, the giving of expensive and lavish presents to certain named members of the BBC staff.”¹⁹

Neither Gielgud nor Rose was accused of taking bribes. The main offender around whom the public scandal broke was Dorothy ‘Tawny’ Neilson, Head of the Dance Band Section.

Cooper told the Postmaster-General that he intended to raise the matter in the Commons on December 19. The Postmaster-General, the Earl of Listowel, alerted the BBC Board of Governors who on December 7 sought to pre-empt Cooper by appointing Sir Valentine Holmes KC to conduct a private inquiry. On December 11, however, charter renewal was listed for debate. Inevitably, Cooper rose and “alleged that contracts for certain work at the BBC were fixed over the luncheon tables of public houses in the vicinity of Oxford Circus” and made specific accusations of silk stockings and fur coats “being given to members of the staff of the BBC.”²⁰ Challenged by the Conservative MP Brendan Bracken, Cooper made it clear that he held the Corporation responsible for the behaviour of its employees:

The real point at issue is that these people are made scapegoats to the misfortune in which they find themselves through having to work in such conditions and under such an organisation, which provides the very circumstances of their downfall.²¹

Earlier in the debate Prime Minister Attlee had announced the resignation of the Chair of Governors, Sir Allan Powell, and his deputy C H G Millis. Evidently they were the scapegoats in this instance.

Cooper cooperated with Holmes’s inquiry but continued to collect evidence and sent his own report to the Prime Minister on February 14 1947. Cooper made seven allegations, all organisational rather than personal. Two might be said to apply to Drama as well as the more overtly corrupt departments:

- ii) Artistes, composers and writers with public reputations prevented from broadcasting.
- vi) Inadequate qualifications of the producers, programme planners and others for the positions they hold on the staff. [Cooper 1948: 29]

Holmes's report came out on March 19 1947 and was widely branded a whitewash. Although Nielson lost her post, she returned to the BBC in an advisory capacity in 1948. When one of Cooper's informants arrived at Broadcasting House to find Neilson running the audition, Cooper decided to publish his findings. Although the accusations against Gielgud are no more than quoted above, he decided to take his "One Year of Grace" before *Caesar's Mistress: The BBC on Trial*^k came out; we know this because in his book about the sabbatical he records being sent a copy in New York. The timing of his year away might have been coincidental but his choice of America, where Neilson had very publicly ridden out the 'bung' scandal, was certainly unfortunate.

9.6 The "Party Manners" scandal

Gielgud took exception to Cooper's accusation "that I had unduly favoured my wife with respect to professional broadcasting engagements; and in a generalized statement to the effect that certain artists, and ex-Service artists in particular, had been deprived of broadcasting work on personal grounds and because favouritism was the dominant factor in the minds of radio-dramatic producers when casting their plays."²² He considered that Vale and Couper had suffered enough by having to resign from the Repertory on marriage. Standards in public life were different in those days; nevertheless it is clear that there was a price to be paid for even being cited in Cooper's accusations. Gielgud lost a year's salary, his wife lost work, and Howard Rose retired earlier than he probably would have done.^l Rose's retirement brought Gielgud back into post two weeks early, in July 1949. Once Archie Harding had been established as his new deputy, Gielgud took the whole of 1950 to bring drama to television.²³ The year was not successful – perhaps proving Gorham right in his reservations about Gielgud – and ended with Gielgud committing the ultimate *folie de grandeur* by televising one of his own plays only to have it banned by the Chairman of Governors.

^k The title is a complicated allusion to the fact that Julius Caesar divorced Pompeia, even though she was innocent of adultery, because "Caesar's wife must be above suspicion", whereas his mistress Circumstancea, for whom he built a house of entertainment which any citizen could enter for a small fee, was beyond criticism. See Cooper 1948: 11-14.

^l But see Chapter 11.

Gielgud always made it clear that his terms of employment prevented him drawing a fee for writing radio plays. BBC staff members were however entitled to fees for work not originally written for broadcasting. Gielgud was a writer of stage plays, perhaps best known for *Chinese White* (1929), and made a habit of having them adapted for broadcasting, for which he demanded a fee.^m On at least one occasion this was seen as a gross abuse of his position. There is a handwritten response from Programme Copyright on a memo requesting payment for *Africa Flight* in December 1939: "Plays not written for broadcasting can be paid for but this cannot apply where a head of a Department puts his own play in his own schedule. C(P) does not agree payment."²⁴

Party Manners had had an airing in the West End and on radio before being performed, live, on BBC Television on Sunday October 1 1950.²⁵ It is a political comedy, High Tory in tone, which mocked politicians in general and government ministers in particular. Though Gielgud always claimed to be apolitical, the theme of *Party Manners* is essentially that government is the province of the patrician classes and that working class politicians are motivated by envy.

Don't be a fool and believe all the petty little intellectuals who think that it makes you a good proletarian to wear a dirty collar, and spit on the floor. If the Party would get a social inferiority complex out of its system it would go faster and farther."
[Gielgud 1950b: 76]

This was acceptable in the commercial theatre, which is always conservative, and attracted little if any comment on radio; but television was front-page news and press supporters of the Attlee government, of which there were several, created a furore.

On the Monday morning the *Daily Herald* adorned its front page with the headline: *We Don't Want Any More of This, Mr Gielgud*, and a vigorous accusation that I had indulged in a deliberate propaganda attack on the Labour Party. On the Tuesday Lord Simon of Wythenshawe cancelled the second performance."
[Gielgud 1965: 152]

Lord Simon, a Labour peer, acted on his own initiative and blocked the scheduled Thursday repeat. No heads rolled, nobody resigned on a point of principle;²⁶ but, equally, nobody was ever again prepared to back Gielgud's judgement unreservedly.

^m For example in 1959 he was paid £80 for Martyn C Webster's 'adaptation' for *Saturday Night Theatre* of his stage play *Not Enough Tragedy* (WAC, Personal File, Copyright, Val Gielgud 1939-62).

Gielgud returned to radio stripped of his responsibility for television drama and wrote a dignified statement to the Director-General given in full at Appendix 6. That drama and politics have been linked throughout history cannot be disputed but never previously had one form of drama been entirely the monopoly of a public corporation wholly dependent on government goodwill. It is noticeable that Gielgud does not mention the radio production of *Party Manners*, which came and went without any sort of furore. This is because Gielgud's offence was not attacking the government of the day – although the premise that Labour would leak atomic secrets for political advantage was a right-wing *canard* of the period – but screening it on the eve of the Labour Party conference. The intention to offend was in the timing of the production.

The evidence of Gielgud's loss of authority after the *Party Manners* scandal is everywhere. In 1952 Charles Lefeaux, Acting Script Editor, complained to Gielgud: "During the Winter we have had to provide over twenty plays for Radio Theatre, which by definition consists of plays specially written for radio, and during the Summer of this year we had to find twelve similar pieces for Thirty Minute Theatre."²⁷ Gielgud did nothing to lessen the load. *Radio Theatre* and *Thirty Minute Theatre* were Light Programme strands and seemingly outside Gielgud's sphere of influence. Bridson recalls in a footnote how Gielgud was overridden in respect of Harold Pinter: "*A Slight Ache* was put up for the Third Programme by Donald McWhinnie, the Assistant Head of Drama, against the recommendation of Val Gielgud."²⁸ By this stage, apparently, even his own deputy did not value Gielgud's opinion.

9.7 Conclusions

Val Gielgud's contribution to the creation of the unique British school of radio drama is undoubted, yet his resentment of criticism ultimately undermined his personal authority and reputation. He attacked drama on the Light Programme, which had finally achieved something that Gielgud had always advocated by introducing new audiences to dramatic forms, because of personal disputes with Maurice Gorham. More damagingly, having escaped any real criticism in Geoffrey Cooper's well-founded attack on the BBC, he could not resist exacting a petty revenge with *Party Manners*, one

of the least effective of his many plays but the only one mentioned in his obituary in *The Times*:ⁿ

There was irony in the fact that the play that made the nation most aware of him was *Party Manners*. It did not show him at his best as a playwright. It did as a man.²⁹

Though Gielgud retained responsibility for line management of the Drama Department, in the wake of *Party Manners* his personal fief was reduced to the Home Service. The Light and the Third were shaped by others and – crucially – were the home of all new writing.

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- ⁶ Gielgud 1950a: 80
- ⁷ *Ibid*
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- ⁹ Gielgud 1957: 70-71
- ¹⁰ Gielgud to Assistant Controller (Ent) July 10 1946, WAC R19/280/4 Drama Policy 1939-1946
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- ²⁰ *The Times*, "House of Commons", Thursday December 12 1946 p. 8
- ²¹ *Ibid*
- ²² Gielgud (1950a) pp. 56-57
- ²³ V H Gielgud, Personal File (WAC L2/77/1)
- ²⁴ WAC, Personal File, Copyright, Val Gielgud 1939-62
- ²⁵ Patrick Delaney, *Before Hutton*, <http://www.transitfiction.org/2012/07/24/before-hutton/>
- ²⁶ Briggs (1979) p. 453
- ²⁷ Lefeaux to Gielgud, December 22 1952, WAC R19/273/3, Entertainment, Drama Memos, File 3 1952
- ²⁸ Bridson (1971) p. 182n
- ²⁹ *The Times*, "Obituaries", Thursday December 1 1981, p. 12

ⁿ Ironically, *Party Manners* appears to be the only Gielgud play preserved in the BBC Sound Archive.

Chapter 10: Drama on the Third Programme

10.1 Introduction

In 1943 Richard Maconachie, Controller of Home Programmes, proposed a postwar 'Cultural Programme', "Directed to a highly intelligent minority audience and including such ingredients as the more 'difficult' music; critical discussions of art, drama, music and literature; poetry and prose readings of the less popular type; experiments in radio drama; programmes in foreign languages etc."¹ The idea was enthusiastically taken up by the next Director General, William Haley, and the Third Programme launched on September 29 1946. In most respects the new channel was remarkably true to Maconachie's original vision, albeit programmes in languages other than English were never likely to flourish. The significant discrepancy, however, was experimental radio drama which, in the sense of a drama of radical content or form that could not successfully exist in any other context, did not arrive until Henry Reed's *The Streets of Pompeii* in 1952. Reed's play won the RAI prize for literary or dramatic programmes at the Prix Italia festival in 1953. The following year Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* won the Prix Italia itself.^a The BBC had long been renowned for its radio drama but its product had never previously been recognised as art. Thereafter, the Third Programme became a natural platform for leading international playwrights with arguably the commissioning of *All That Fall* from Samuel Beckett, the case study in this chapter, as its high point.

Although experimental drama was delayed, the Third from the outset mounted adaptations of modern European plays and in no sense shied away from controversy. In its first week, for example, it offered an unabridged production of Sartre's *Huis Clos*^b, which was banned from the English stage at the time. Of greater significance in terms of radio drama was Harding's 1948 production of *The Man Outside*, a play radical in both form and content which had originally been produced by British-controlled German radio.

^a See Chapter 8.

^b Given under the title *Vicious Circle* (Carpenter 1996: 34)

The Third's lack of time constraints allowed the development of radio drama in extraordinary ways, notably Reed's seven-play *Hilda Tablet* sequence and Bridson's massive hybrid dramatisation/co-authorship of Wyndham Lewis's *The Human Age*.^c Yet with the exception of Reed new writers were not making their name on the Third, audiences began low and shrank, and adaptations continued to predominate.^d

10.2 European drama

Despite the *Great Plays* fiasco of 1928, the Third Programme always had a predisposition towards European drama. In the early years of the service, Europe was the hub of innovation in drama and the stage plays of Sartre, Camus and Betti were introduced to British audiences by the minority channel. These were often much more extreme than would be permitted on the London stage while the Lord Chamberlain still acted as censor or more avant-garde than would be tolerated in the commercial theatre. Wolfgang Borchert's *The Man Outside*^e was one such, a play about the consequences of Germany's defeat in which God is a character, denounced to his face.

In a sense, the most remarkable thing about *The Man Outside* is that it was broadcast at all. The 1954 investigation of the BBC's script-reading system shows the kind of material the Drama Department was receiving and rejecting – largely thrillers and dramatisations of 'safe' classics.^f One can only imagine what Howard Rose would have made of Borchert's waking nightmare. But BBC employees had already produced *The Man Outside* (*Draussen vor der Tür*) in Germany in 1947.

^c For discussion of *The Human Age* as a listening experience, see Chapter 16.

^d Gielgud (1957) includes a 'Note on the drama output of the Third Programme' from 1946 to the time of writing, probably December 1955. It is a list compiled from memory, with notable omissions, but within the list only 22 are original radio plays, 20 are dramatisations, and 42 are adapted stage plays, excluding "Shakespeare, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Congreve, and Oscar Wilde ... Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes ... Molière, Calderon, Tchekov, and Pirandello" and "surveys, comprehensively illustrated by productions, of the work of Ibsen, Strindberg, and Bernard Shaw respectively." (Gielgud 1957: 200) On that basis it is safe to assume that new work comprised less than 10% of Third Programme drama, probably less.

^e November 29 1948, repeated December 3 and December 21.

^f See Chapter 11.

Having been court-martialled three times for insubordination (the greatest punishment his tormentors could conceive was to send him back to the Eastern Front),² Borchert walked home to Hamburg in late 1945. There he was diagnosed with incurable liver disease, probably hepatitis. He began writing prose poems and then, over the winter of 1946-7, wrote three versions of *Draussen vor der Tür*. One script was sent to his local radio station, accepted and produced within a month.

Hamburg was the home of the Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk (NWDR) which, being in the British Zone of occupied Germany, had been reorganized by seconded BBC employees led by the future Director-General Hugh Carleton Greene.³ Central to allied strategy for broadcasting was the restoration of a German identity through the *Heimat* or homeland concept, as opposed to the Nazi vision of *Reich*.⁴ Borchert's play can be read as a quest for the *Heimat* taken away by the Nazis and this, perhaps more than the brutal passion of the writing, explains NWDR's enthusiasm for the piece.

The first broadcast was on February 13 1947. Borchert did not hear it because there was a power cut in his part of Hamburg.⁵ He did, however, hear one of the two repeats rapidly mounted following a huge audience response. Within weeks *Draussen vor der Tür* had been aired in every German sector. Royalties and advances for the book and stage versions enabled Borchert to enter a Swiss sanatorium where he died on November 20 1947, the day before the stage premiere in Hamburg.

The play is Expressionist, a style somewhat old-fashioned in stage terms by 1947-8 but still radical in terms of British radio drama; and although the stage version of *The Man Outside* has been part of the German repertoire for almost sixty years there can be doubt that Borchert wrote it primarily for radio. The play's subject is dramatic yet its form is untheatrical. The characters are grotesques like the Giant One Leg or abstract like The Other, the protagonist's superego personified. The Other is thoroughly radiogenic, the voice inside Beckmann's head, and gives the play its seamless,

² See Alexander Badenoch, "Making Sunday what it actually should be: Sunday radio programming and the re-invention of tradition in occupied Germany 1945-1949", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* Vol. 25, No. 4 October 2005, pp. 577-598, and Steven W Lawrie, "'Das Grosse Turnierfeld, auf dem sie sich Versuchen': Erich Fried's work for German Radio", *German Life and Letters* Vol 51, No 1 January 1998 pp 121-146.

³ Borchert's personal story of the 600 kilometre walk home is indeed the recurring motif of Edgar Reitz's epic film series *Heimat* (1984-2004).

picaresque flow. In terms of structure, indeed, *The Man Outside* is more cinematic than stagebound¹ and in the spoken prologue Borchert sets it up as a film rather than a dream. “A man came to Germany,” the Narrator says, the very first words of the play:

And there he saw a quite fantastic film. ... About a man who came to Germany, one of the many. One of the many who come home – and then don't come home, because there's no home for them anymore. And their home is outside the door. Their Germany is outside in the rain at night in the street.⁴

The Other fights to make Beckmann accept the world he finds himself in, to persuade him that life is worth living. To that end he tries, and fails, to prevent him abusing God in one of the most powerful scenes ever done on radio.

BECKMANN: When exactly are you dear, dear God? Were you dear when you let my little son, my little son, who was just a year old, be torn to pieces by a screaming bomb? Were you dear, dear God, when you had him murdered?

GOD: I didn't have him murdered.

BECKMANN: No, quite right. You only permitted it. You didn't heed when he screamed and the bombs roared. Where were you actually, when the bombs roared, dear God? ... When have you ever bothered yourself about us, God?”⁵

By the end, even The Other has deserted Beckmann. He is alone, a furious lone voice in the empty darkness:

Now I need you, Answerer! Where are you? Suddenly, you're not there! Where are you, Answerer, where are you, you who grudged me death? Where is the old man who called himself God?

Why doesn't he speak?

Answer!

Why are you silent? Why?

Will none of your answer?

Will no one answer?

Nobody?

No one?⁶

One could argue that a play like *The Man Outside* was exactly what the Third Programme was created for. In reality, however, the Third never broadcast anything like it again. *Under Milk Wood* and *All That Fall* are landmarks of modern dramatic

¹ *The Man Outside* was in due course filmed, unsuccessfully, as *Liebe 47* (dir. Wolfgang Liebeneiner) 1949.

literature – the latter is certainly a better play than *The Man Outside* – but neither has anything approaching the shocking power of Borchert.^j

Far more acceptable to British tastes in the 1950s were the moral parables of the Italian judge Ugo Betti (1892-1953) who established a posthumous reputation through the Third Programme by virtue of a translator of greater genius, the poet Henry Reed. Beginning with *The Queen and the Rebels* in 1954, in which revolutionary forces mistake a street prostitute for the fugitive queen, Reed translated seven of Betti's plays for the Third.^k Donald McWhinnie's productions created a commercial demand to the extent that Reed's translations of *The Queen and the Rebels*, *The Burnt Flower-Bed* and *Summertime* were all running on the London stage in December 1955. Despite its notoriously small audiences the Third was clearly influencing the world of drama outside the confines of monopoly broadcasting.

10.3 Henry Reed

Reed was a dramatist who could only have flourished on the Third. Too uncommercial for the stage and too cerebral for the Home Service, he was a poet, critic and connoisseur of world literature, more prolific than his friend Sackville-West and wittier than MacNeice. Between 1947 and 1961 Reed produced more than thirty plays, adaptations and dramatisations for the Third, ranging from profound meditations on the nature of creativity to a sequence of scurrilous intellectual comedies including a spoof all-female opera (with Donald Swann). Reed saw the Third as a platform for great literature and no one did more to make it so. It was Reed whose work first won international recognition of the BBC's new role as patron of dramatic literature when *The Streets of Pompeii* was awarded the RAI Prize in 1953.

Reed's first full-length original radio play *Pytheas* (1947) was perhaps too much a hybrid of *Moby Dick* (which Reed successfully dramatised for radio in January 1947)

^j *The Man Outside* was finally revived, in Rob Walker's new translation, by Jeremy Mortimer in 1997 (Radio 3 July 6). This is the version held in the National Sound Archive [H9002 1].

^k The others being *The Burnt Flower-Bed* (1955), *Crime on Goat Island* (1956), *Irene* (1957), *Corruption in the Palace of Justice* (1958), *The House on the Water* (1961) and *Summertime* (sometimes called *Holiday Land*) (1969).

and *The Rescue*, the story of the semi-legendary Greek explorer and his voyage round Britain in the fourth century BC. Two years later Reed found his theme with the two-part *Leopardi*,¹ a biography of the tragic Italian poet Count Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837). The work is novel-like in scope, written in verse, and moves across time, a Reed signature.

More Italian plays followed. *Malatesta* (1952) and *Vincenzo* (1955) were both set during the Renaissance. *The Great Desire I Had* (1952) was about Shakespeare touring Italy. *The Streets of Pompeii*^m is however the masterpiece among Reed's Italian plays, set in the doomed city through the ages and across time. Modern tourists wander through ruins still populated – on an imaginative plane – with ancient citizens oblivious of their impending doom. The tourists and the ancients speak an everyday demotic. On a metaphysical level the Sibyl of Cumae and a faceless Traveller discourse in a kind of elaborate prose poem. On the most physical level, the teenage lovers Francesca and Attilio voice their passion in colloquial, stilted verse. Reed creates a complex dramatic structure that could easily become pretentious but is grounded by the startling linking device of the Lizard – a perfectly ordinary lizard of the kind that has been running round Pompeii since time immemorial with its basic preoccupations of eating, sleeping and controlling its temperature. The Lizard – originally voiced by the doyen of the BBC Repertory, Carleton Hobbes – speaks Beckettian, a year before the premiere of *Godot*:

(drowsily) Breathe gently. Careful. In-out-in-out. Hot, all over back. Noise? No. Sleep? Yes. Just a bit. Watch. No better... *Skip*. [Reed 1971a: 162]

Nobody in the world was writing plays like Reed's. For the first half of the decade he alone was creating a cohesive dramatic literature for radio, as learned as MacNeice but with a more natural gift for dramatic effect.

The Streets of Pompeii is unquestionably a masterpiece but many would argue that Reed's enduring legacy is his sequence of seven Hilda Tablet plays (1953-59). Roger Savage calls them a “dramatic *roman fleuve* cum highbrow soap opera”⁷ and Kate Whitehead uses *A Hedge Backwards* as a case study of dramatic features on the Third.⁸ The sequence is actually more a gentle satire of the obsequious school of art feature and

¹ *The Unblest*, May 9 1949, and *The Monument*, March 7 1950

^m March 16 1952

a soap only in the sense of recurring characters. *Emily Butter* aside, these are six full-length plays with plots and character development. The comedic style is pure Aristophanes, who was never a political satirist as Gielgud claimedⁿ but a puncturer of pretension.

Like the best satirists, Reed does not exclude himself from the joke. *A Very Great Man Indeed*^o opens with Herbert Reeve extolling the merits of his subject: “The late Richard Shewin has been justly called the ‘poet’s novelist’.”⁹ Artistically, then, the listener knows instantly what Reed is lampooning. The sort of people he is making fun of is made clear when Reeve recalls his visit to Shewin’s brother Stephen, and Stephen’s wife, Connie. Connie can’t move for her “pussies” and Stephen won’t get out of bed because “there’s nothing to get up for.”¹⁰ Stephen reveals that Richard had an affair with Connie; Connie then tells Reeve that Stephen had an affair with Richard’s wife. Reeve soaks up the information and concludes:

A full consideration of the great richness of Richard Shewin’s domestic relationships will perhaps have to wait until later... What Professor Grelling has called the brother-motive in Shewin’s later work offers the student particularly fascinating, if somewhat baffling, material. [Reed 1971b: 20]

Reeve’s quest eventually leads him to the “lady music-writer” Hilda Tablet, said to have been Shewin’s lost love – despite the fact that she dresses as a man and lives with the submissive Elsa Strauss. Asked to sum up Shewin’s character, Hilda “plays D-sharp and B-flat on the piano; then reverses them.”

That’s Dick Shewin for you, Mr Reeve. In two notes. (*rather huskily*) You may write a whole ruddy book about him, but you’ll never get him expressed as briefly as that. [Reed 1971b: 39]

Hilda and the Shewins returned in *The Private Life of Hilda Tablet*^p wherein Reeve recounts his travels with Hilda, culminating on the opening night of her opera *Emily Butter*, “when Hilda, wearing her own tails-jacket, her baton raised, her fine figure silhouetted against the soft glow of the orchestra lights, hurled herself upon her greatest triumph.”¹¹ Listeners were able to hear the opera itself six months later. *A Hedge*

ⁿ See Appendix 6

^o September 7 1953, produced by Douglas Cleverdon, with music by Donald Swann.

^p May 25 1954, produced by Cleverdon, with music by Swann.

*Backwards*⁹ found Reeve engaged in writing a twelve-volume life of Tablet. *The Primal Scene, As It Were*[†] sees the Tablet *ménage* cruising the Mediterranean at the invitation of the Greek millionaire Aeschylus Aphanisis. Reed introduces a new level of in-joke when Reeve tells the listener that he would describe the voyage but “the still admirable Third Programme has in recent times been rudely truncated.”¹² The final plays in the sequence, *Not a Drum was Heard* and *Musique Discrète*,[§] are not included in the 1971 collection but the title of the last indicates that Reed was continuing his affectionate send-up of the Third.

There is simply no parallel for the Tablet sequence. No dramatist has managed seven full-length episodes of what is essentially the same joke. There are no close parallels in prose literature. Perhaps the nearest approximation would be *Tristram Shandy* in that Sterne makes the context – in his case the published book – part of the joke. For a supposedly repressed decade, there is a startlingly frank sexual subtext, especially in the early plays, with Shewin’s raging libido (“He was an all-the-lights-on man, Dicky Shewin was, every time.”¹³) and Hilda’s implied lesbianism. *Musique Discrète* was the last original play, only twelve years after the first, and Reed – surely the only original genius of drama on the Third – spent much of the 1960s lecturing in the United States.

10.4 Case study: “All That Fall” (1957)

In a sense, *All That Fall*[†] is Beckett’s Irish equivalent of *Under Milk Wood*, “an aural tapestry”¹⁴ in which comic regional characters go about their daily round beset by hopes and fears and tormented by memory. Both plays relish the opportunity for bawdy,^u which both writers see as a regional trait. Where Llarregub is an amalgam of New Quay and Laugharne, Boghill is the Foxrock of Beckett’s childhood.¹⁵ The characters are Irish, with Irish names and Irish patterns of speech. Where Thomas struggled within the

⁹ February 29 1956, produced by Cleverdon, with music by Swann.

[†] March 11 1958, produced by Cleverdon, with music by Swann.

[§] May 6 1959 and October 27 1959, both produced by Cleverdon, with music by Swann.

¹ January 13 1957

^u For example, the following interchange [Beckett 1957: 14]:

MRS ROONEY: ... I’ll never do it ... you’ll have to get down, Mr Slocum, and help me from the rear...

MR SLOCUM: ... I’m coming, Mrs Rooney, I’m coming, give me time, I’m stiff as yourself.

limitations of the dramatic feature, however, there can be no doubt that Beckett wrote a play. *All That Fall* has a protagonist, Maddy Rooney, who is on a mission to collect husband Dan from the station and through whose sensibilities the listener encounters the world of the play.

Much has been made of the way in which Mrs Rooney conjures up the sounds of her world. The BBC's Radiophonic Workshop came together initially to create the aural effects for *All That Fall*¹⁶ and the original producer, McWhinnie, has written at length about the challenge of Beckett's aural imagination.

The highly individual blend of realism and poetic vision in the text necessitated a corresponding feeling in the treatment of the actual sounds. Strict realism would have been crude, complete stylisation pretentious. It soon became clear that a double technique was the probable solution. The sounds which gradually impinged on the consciousness of the presumably alcoholic heroine must begin as fantasy and resolve into some form of perceptible reality; thus the donkey-and-cart, the bicycle, the car, which approach her on the road, were initially distorted and only gradually emerged into a recognisable sound. On the other hand, the footsteps of Mr and Mrs Rooney, their real journey, must gradually attract poetic and symbolic overtones, so that eventually even the wind and rain which beat against them are almost musical in conception.

[McWhinnie 1959: 85]

McWhinnie was convinced that Beckett wrote to a "four-beats-in-a-bar" rhythm,¹⁷ which he clearly does not, and the belief that Mrs Rooney is a drinker is not supported by the text; indeed, it is wholly unlike Beckett to give his characters an excuse for either their garrulousness or, later, their silence. Nevertheless, the technique McWhinnie developed with his sound engineers for creating the aural landscape – essentially, "having human beings to impersonate the exact sound required"¹⁸ and then processing it electronically – became the signature most discussed by later critics. For example, John Pilling:

The radiophonic instructions are as lapidary as Beckett's stage directions, but it is clear that the earliest sounds of all are devoted to creating a sense of environment against which the subsequent events may be imagined. They are, however, deliberately exaggerated to remind us of the fictional status of those events, and it is no surprise therefore that the central characters should also be periodically afflicted with the feeling that they, too, are mere fictional constructs.

[Pilling 1976:94]

Again, this goes too far. Mrs Rooney only “conjures up” sounds in moments of soliloquy. This, we come to realise, is where we begin the play but is much more effective later, when we know we are inside her head. For example, in the third act, when she pauses in the walk home with Dan:

All is still. No living soul in sight. There is no one to ask. The world is feeding. The wind--- (*brief wind*) --- scarcely stirs the leaves and the birds--- (*brief chirp*) ---are tired singing. The cows--- (*brief moo*) ---and the sheep--- (*brief baa*) --- ruminates in silence. [Beckett 1957:32]

At other times – for example when the wind gets up as Maddy steps onto the platform – the sound effect precedes the thought.

Donald Davie, reviewing the published text for *Spectrum*,^v recognised the game Beckett was really playing: “The radio-play is a new genre for Beckett, and it’s notable how, by a comic use of sound-effects, he at once exploits the medium by parodying it.”¹⁹ Most famously, this awareness of form comes in the second act when the other villagers are all busy greeting one another on the station platform and ignoring Mrs Rooney. Against a background of bright good-mornings Maddy slyly observes, “Do not imagine, because I am silent, that I am not present...”²⁰

Towards the end of the play the tone shifts from comedy to tragedy. Likewise Beckett’s exploitation of the medium changes from parody to irony. In the last scene, young Jerry catches up with the Rooneys, returning something Dan Rooney dropped at the station. At first Rooney pretends the object is not his, then becomes violent when challenged. Maddy Rooney doesn’t know what it is. “It looks like a kind of ball. And yet it is not a ball.” On stage – not that Beckett would ever permit his plays to change medium – this object would perforce have to be something, and in the minimalist world of Beckett everything has resonance. A punctured football, a pig’s bladder – each would resonate differently. On radio, and only on radio, ambiguity can be preserved. Whatever the object is, it is important to Rooney. Perhaps being a blind character in the so-called “blind” medium he truly doesn’t know what it is.

All That Fall can thus be seen as the play that not only marked a coming of age of literary radio drama but also, more importantly, the point where a dramatist who had

^v Winter 1958

made a reputation on the stage came to radio to develop his range. *All That Fall* was written alongside Beckett's second stage play *Endgame*. All his subsequent radio plays would be written before the third stage play *Happy Days* and radio was where he sketched out the foundations of his future dramatic development with mute or semi-mute protagonists listening to disembodied voices – a radio drama paradigm

10.5 Conclusions

The Third Programme began with the highest aspirations but as Whitehead acknowledges, "A programme devoted to a cultured elite could only reinforce received ideas about high culture being the preserve of the highly privileged, and thus the audience for high culture would never expand."²¹

In October 1946 only 4% of listeners ever listened to the Third²² and audiences then fell away to 1.4% by 1950.²³ Burton Paulu fleshes out the figures: "Seldom has it attracted at any one time more than 50,000 listeners out of the entire country's 38,500,000 adults. This is only about 2 per cent of the average evening audience, or a bit more than one tenth of 1 per cent of the United Kingdom's population over the age of fifteen."²⁴

These are not enticing numbers. 50,000 is probably forty times more people than crammed into the Arts Theatre to see the original runs of *Waiting for Godot* or *Huis Clos*, but is only about the same number who paid to see Reed's translations of Betti in the West End in the autumn of 1955. Compared to the massive audiences enjoyed by drama on other BBC channels, 10 million for *Saturday Night Theatre* or 16 million for *Dick Barton*, they are so tiny as to be insignificant.

Yet after 1946 the Third was the only home for forward-looking British radio drama. It was the only outlet where such talents as diverse as Reed and Beckett could share a broadcast platform and *All That Fall* is testament to the extent to which the BBC, through the Third, established its bona fides with the avant-garde. Even so, the perennial problem remained: the shortage of scripts.

References

- ¹ Whitehead 1989: 12
- ² See Burgess 2003: 57-90
- ³ Burgess 2003: 119
- ⁴ Borchert, trans. Porter (1948), BBC playscript incorporating handwritten changes of tense by producer E A Harding, p. 1
- ⁵ Borchert, trans. Porter 1952: 114
- ⁶ Borchert, trans. Porter (1948), BBC playscript incorporating handwritten changes of last two lines by producer E A Harding, p. 41
- ⁷ Roger Savage, "The radio plays of Henry Reed" in Drakakis 1981: 163-164
- ⁸ Whitehead 1989: 35-60
- ⁹ Reed 1971b: 11
- ¹⁰ Reed 1971b: 14
- ¹¹ Reed 1971b: 101
- ¹² Reed 1971b: 154
- ¹³ Reed 1971b: 23
- ¹⁴ Kennedy 1975: 157
- ¹⁵ Cohn 1973: 158
- ¹⁶ Everett C Frost, "Fundamental Sounds: Recording Samuel Beckett's Radio Plays". in *Theatre Journal* 43:3, October 1991, p. 367
- ¹⁷ McWhinnie 1959: 133
- ¹⁸ McWhinnie 1959: 133
- ¹⁹ Graver & Federman 1979: 154
- ²⁰ Beckett 1957: 23
- ²¹ Whitehead 1989: 2
- ²² Briggs 1979: 65
- ²³ Briggs 1979: 81
- ²⁴ Paulu 1961: 153

Chapter 11: Qualitative appraisals

11.1 Introduction

By the end of the war, Gielgud was professing little or no confidence in Silvey's Listener Research, which he held responsible for the Americanisation of BBC radio drama. In 1956 he complained, "The value to Sound Broadcasting of Listener Research figures and their influence on programme policies should be re-examined."¹ Nevertheless there was clearly a requirement, from time to time, for an informed assessment of the condition of the Drama Department's product. Thus in 1942 the critic Ivor Brown was commissioned to appraise radio drama over a nine-week period. Albeit the outcome went against Gielgud's own inclinations and was therefore ignored, the experiment was repeated in 1952 and 1953 with a two-part study of the expanded postwar output by the director of the influential Arts Theatre, John Fernald.

Brown and Fernald agreed that the future of radio drama lay with the original radio play but recognised that originals were few and far between and varied greatly in quality. Thus a further study was undertaken of the process by which scripts were accepted for production. The divergence of opinion between informed outside readers and the internal "consultants" was so marked that Gielgud agreed to the creation of a Script Unit, which in turn fostered open submissions and thereby ended the policy of commissioning plays from "authors with whom members of the staff are on personal terms."²

11.2 The Ivor Brown report (1942)

Brown was an authoritative drama critic, sometime editor of the *Observer* and occasional dramatist.^a In Spring 1942 he was commissioned to write a critical appraisal of the condition of radio drama. Over a nine-week period from the middle of March to the middle of May he listened to twenty-one plays, three features and a tone poem, and

^a For example his one-act play *I Made You Possible* was broadcast on the National Programme, April 15 1937, produced by Barbara Burnham.

based on this listening experience and his general experience of listening to BBC radio drama produced a qualitative overview.

Brown prefaced his remarks with a statement of what he called “The Prevailing Limitation”, arguing that “The condition of invisibility must be the governing consideration in the choice of broadcasting material.”³ Thus most stage plays, deprived of visible setting and physical performance, translated poorly to radio in Brown’s opinion, with two exceptions: “poetical drama, especially Shakespeare” and plays “of a peculiarly intellectual and argumentative kind.”⁴ Two Shakespeare plays were broadcast during the March-May period, which Brown considered “well worth while” although he felt that more explanatory narration was required. In terms of “The Argumentative Exception” the study period included the broadcast of Linklater’s *The Cornerstones*. Brown thought this “a shade too long” but concluded:

The invisibility mattered very little. Of course it wasn’t all argument, but the final effect of *Courage* mustering its forces all over the world was Good Radio, something efficiently expressible and efficiently expressed in terms of sound.”⁵

The four other stage plays adapted over the study period^b Brown disliked, essentially because “Invisible, they are nothing.” He preferred the two film adaptations, although *How Green Was My Valley* was “far less impressive” than MacNeice’s radical reshaping of *Alexander Nevsky* – so radical, indeed, that Brown considered it a tone poem more than a play. He cited dramatic features as an illustration of why original radio material was almost always better than adapted stage material, singling out Monckton Hoffe’s *Rhapsody in Grey*:

“Rhapsody in Grey” was no more than a magazine story in essence, but as written by Mr Hoffe and directed by Mr Gielgud it developed some poignancy and struck me as an example of what radio drama could generally achieve, when a tale is told in a pattern of sound.”⁶

Like all commentators on radio drama during Gielgud’s time, Brown was expected to pass judgement on the quality of sound effects and the standard of radio acting. Regarding effects Brown felt strongly that they were being used inappropriately, an overuse of spot effects (“the beer-into-glass kind of effect”) lingering on from the Savoy

^b *The Storm* (Ostrovsky), *Mr Kreschinsky Decides to Marry* (A V Sukhovo-Kobylin), *Admiral Guinea* (R L Stevenson and W E Henley) and *Square Pegs* (Lionel Brown).

Hill period whereas “the natural scene (sound of wind, trees, birds, movement of water and so on) still offers scope for ingenuity and beauty of sound-pattern which have not, in my experience, been fully realised.”⁷ In terms of acting, “I have often heard it said of the BBC Drama that is spoilt by mincing and effeminate voices.”⁸ Brown, however, considered the standard was acceptable albeit some was “breathy” and women tended “to get very ‘gasp’ in attempting emotion at the microphone”. His main concern was that the wartime Repertory Company was being squandered on “an enormous amount of time-filling and programme-padding work.”

Given that drama had been drastically reduced in the wartime schedules, Brown’s conclusion that it should be further reduced strikes a perverse note, especially as he does not mention any of the ten original radio plays he says he listened to in the study period. In fact what he advocates is a return to the ‘fine art’ aspiration of the pre-Gielgud experimental period. There can have been few members of the Department who missed Brown’s reference to a Jeffrey-Sieveking style “Research Group” in his penultimate paragraph:

The Drama Department, released from its drudgery of helping the programme along, could disband its Repertory Company, now pounding through a large number of stage-plays, and become a Research Group, far smaller and heard far less often, and then only in work specially composed for the Radio and very carefully considered by the heads of the Group in relation to radio’s possibilities.⁹

Brown said nothing that the Drama Department, as then constituted, wanted to hear. Gielgud had risen by diminishing Jeffrey’s experimentalism and no BBC departmental head, before or after Gielgud, was likely to willingly reduce his section’s output.

11.3 Two reports by John Fernald (1952 and 1953)

Though nothing came of Brown’s appraisal a second attempt to establish radio’s position within the dramatic arts was made ten years later when John Fernald was commissioned to assess the condition of the form at the end of its third decade.

Fernald was Director of the Arts Theatre, the home of theatrical experiment in London. As a members' club the Arts was outside the Lord Chancellor's censorship remit and thus the only place in Britain – other than the BBC Third Programme – where Sartre's *Huis Clos* could be performed.

The output that Fernald surveyed was both more extensive and more ordered than that considered by Brown. The Drama Department now offered plays across three channels in four principal strands (*Saturday Night Theatre*, *The Monday Night Play*, *Curtain Up*, and plays on the Third). Fernald therefore produced two reports, the first considering *Saturday Night Theatre* and *Curtain Up* between February and June 1952,^c the second assessing *The Monday Night Play* and plays on the Third Programme between January and March 1953.

Brown reported at an important time nationally but Fernald conducted his first appraisal at a time of greater importance for the BBC. The first half of 1952 was a period of Charter renewal marked by debate on the future of radio with or against television and the future of the BBC with or against competition. The broadcasting white paper, postponing competition in the short term, passed the Commons with a majority of only 28 on May 15.

Fernald's conclusions are favourable. He considers some of the plays he heard to be worthless but overall concludes that radio drama has characteristics that not only make it different to stage drama but in some respects preferable. He begins his first report with the statement that, "Radio Drama is strongest when telling a story or evoking an atmosphere, and weakest when expressing artifice or exploiting 'clever' dialogue."¹⁰ He continues:

Radio's trump card is sincerity, the emotional appeal of which is more intimate and immediate than in any other medium, (and this fact is also its greatest danger, since the microphone exposes the phoney with utter ruthlessness and phoney feeling is more sickening through the loudspeaker than on the stage.¹¹

He believes that good stage plays lose little or nothing in radio adaptation and that mediocre stage plays are often better on radio. Although he does not distinguish

^c Fernald surveyed an odd period from February 6 to June 11. It may be that he planned to begin on Saturday February 2 but schedules were interrupted by the death of George VI on February 6 and his funeral a week later.

between adaptations and originals in his specific comments, he maintains “The best plays for radio come from those specially written for the medium...”¹² Although he recognises the attraction of dramatising novels he uses the only dramatisation of the survey period, Wells’s *Tono-Bungay*, to illustrate the pitfalls:

It was even better produced than any of the other plays I have listened to – and impeccably cast. ... Yet it left one comparatively unmoved, and this was no fault of the expert adapter, but arose solely from the difference between the novel and the theatre. The play simply lacked conflict, which in the novel was expressed in retrospect through the mind of the character, coloured and decorated by the wisdom which comes with the passing of time. But the essence of theatrical conflict is that it is immediate, and the immediacy was, of course, lacking.¹³

Fernald draws no distinction between *Saturday Night Theatre* and *Curtain Up*, thereby confirming Gielgud’s view that they were essentially the same thing. In other respects he is heretical: he did not like Shaw’s *You Never Can Tell* although it had been received wisdom since *St Joan* in 1929 that Shaw’s didacticism was perfect for radio; and he did not think much of the three feature dramas – *Give Us This Day*, *For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow* and *Evening Surgery* – which he considered put content over character. He considered the overall standard of radio acting to be good but thought the best stage stars, for example Jack Hulbert in Somerset Maugham’s *Jack Straw*, were just as capable at the microphone as members of the Repertory. He singles out the use of a narrator in *Miss Pym Disposes* for his only real diatribe:

It is quite extraordinary what death to drama the narrator is. And yet it is really not extraordinary at all: there is nothing peculiar to radio technique to make it any more reasonable suddenly to cut across action and dialogue with story-telling than it would be in the theatre.¹⁴

For his second report Fernald considered the “more ambitious programmes” of the Third Programme and *The Monday Night Play*. To illustrate his point “that the loudspeaker filters through very little of the truth when the form of the material and the dramatist’s technique become too complex”¹⁵ he considered in some detail Gielgud’s production of Chekhov’s *The Seagull*.^d It was a play Fernald knew well as he himself mounted a production of a newer translation at the Arts in April 1953. Arguing that

^d It has not been possible as yet to determine the date of this production. Unusually Gielgud refers to it in *British Radio Drama 1922-1956* with the anecdote that Fay Compton not only doubled Arkadina and Masha when the actress playing Masha fell ill, but also vocalised the howling dog sound effect (Gielgud 1957: 155).

Chekhov wrote for a theatre of nuance, reliant on visual context, unvoiced communication such as smiles and frowns, and above all meaningful pauses, he concluded that the plays are wholly unsuited to radio. Within five years, however, Beckett and Pinter would make pauses and silences the places in which radio drama flourished.

Fernald found similar unsuitability in the plays of Jean Anouilh of which the Third Programme broadcast two during the period under consideration.^c Indeed Fernald did not like any of the comedies he listened to – Kleist’s *Too Often to the Well* (“suet pudding”) or Webber’s *The Gift* (“introspective fog”) – with the sole exception of Peter Watt’s production of Ben Jonson’s *Volpone*. “One realised once again with this production, that the more a producer is confident, experienced and sensitive, the less he indulges in tricks and strivings after effect...”¹⁶

In fact almost everything Fernald discussed in his second report was an adapted stage play, from Lillian Hellman’s *Montserrat* to a series of Shakespeare’s problem plays. None of the modern adapted stage plays impressed Fernald, although he suggested that since Shaw’s death (in 1950) less reverential productions might succeed in radio. He deeply disliked the only original play mentioned in the report, *Marshal Ney* by the academic J C Masterman:^f “utterly characterless dialogue and a humourless approach on the part of the writer”.¹⁷ What most impressed him were the two dramatisations of classic modern novels, *The Great Gatsby*^g and *Cakes and Ale*^h.

Gatsby impressed Fernald so much that he changed his mind about the form – “contrary to my previous opinion, the dramatised novel is a form to be reckoned with on the air¹⁸” – albeit it confirmed his distaste for the intrusive narrator. Primarily what caught his imagination was the atmosphere, “most evocative of the days of inter-war futility. The sound effects were beautifully timed and subtly used, so that one could actually see the parties on Long Island and people driving about in fast cars and drinking high-balls.”¹⁹ Howard Agg’s dramatisation of *Cakes and Ale* was so successful

^c The *pièce grinçante* *The Waltz of the Toreadors* on Sunday January 11 and the earlier *pièce noire* *Traveller Without Luggage* on Saturday March 22.

^f *Monday Play*, March 23.

^g Third Programme, January 25.

^h *Monday Play*, February 2.

that “it seemed to be, not an adaptation of a novel, but the essential work that Maugham created, unadulterated, uncurtailed and in toto. It was, in fact, ‘spoken literature.’”²⁰

Both dramatisations led Fernald to the conclusion that “the broadcast play of the future will be very far removed from the play of the theatre.”²¹ He envisaged a drama more akin to the modern novel than to the stage in that it would be a drama about the conflict of ideas or the internal psychological conflict. He did not find any such plays in either of his survey periods, just as Brown had found no “beauty of sound-pattern” in his. Both appraisers agreed that the virtue of radio drama lies in evocation and atmosphere, yet clearly few if any examples were being broadcast. The most striking omission from the three studies is (with the exception of *Marshal Ney*, which sounds more like a feature in any case) the original play for radio. Clearly original plays were being broadcast – although without details it is difficult to identify them with certainty – but not in the “more ambitious” strands. Even the “lighter” strands were predominantly adaptations and dramatisations. Yet from 1929 Gielgud referred repeatedly to the large number of submissions received and there was self-evidently a reasonable market for books about writing radio plays, not least by Gielgud himself. The question therefore arose: if the future of radio drama rested with original work, as everyone from Silvey to Brown and Fernald agreed that it did, why were so few original scripts achieving production?

11.4 An investigation into play reading (1953)

Unsolicited plays arrived regularly at the BBC, some of which doubtless made it onto the air. The ultimate decision lay with a producer line-managed by Gielgud but in 1953 there was also a small Script Unit attached to the Drama Department consisting of Charles Lefeaux and an assistant which oversaw the consideration of all submissions. The first sieving of material, however, was done by two ‘outside’ readers – and in 1953, when Fernald’s report was followed by a systematic review of the script reading system, those readers were Gielgud’s former colleagues, Howard Rose and Barbara Burnham, both of whom had officially retired from the BBC in 1949 and 1945 respectively.²²

The report²³ sits in the Written Archives undated and without any indication as to who conducted the review. Gielgud's two memos confirm the timeframe and his differentiation between "the outside readers and the staff readers" confirms that whoever conducted the review was at least independent of the Drama Department if not the BBC. The author of the report refers to himself (or herself) as "the Observer". He and his team read 232 unsolicited plays before passing them on to the readers. Rose read 132 of the scripts in a month, Burnham the other 100 in a fortnight. The scripts were returned to the Unit with both sets of reports for a decision. Where there was a divergence of opinion between the Observer and the reader, or between the Observer and the Unit, the script and reports were forwarded to Gielgud for a final decision. There were 68 such plays, 32 of which involved a wide divergence of opinion, 36 a narrow divergence.

It is clearly impossible to re-assess scripts that cannot be read, most of which were never produced. There are three writers mentioned who are reasonably well known (Ronald Duncan, Michael Bond, Elleston Trevor) but this in itself means nothing; good writers can write bad plays, unknown writers can write works of genius. The narrow divergences in opinion can reasonably be dismissed as subjective matters of taste. The 32 examples of wide divergence, however, allow a general appraisal of the quality of decision making in the middle of 1953 and illustrate to some extent the tensions within the Drama Department at a time of transition – that is to say, as plays deriving from the Features tradition began winning international awards.

One fact immediately apparent from Appendix 7 is that more of Rose's recommendations were controversial than Burnham's; although Rose read more scripts, the difference – 23 to 9 – is marked. This was not the case with narrow divergences of opinion, where both had 18 recommendations queried. Equally, 15 of Rose's reports were more favourable than the Script Unit's opinion whereas Burnham and the Script Unit differed on only 3. The only major difference between Burnham and the Script Unit was *Murder Mistaken*; the others were merely 'possibles'. With Rose, however, the vast majority are Yes/No differences, and in all but one instance he also differs completely from Gielgud. That single instance of Rose-Gielgud-Script Unit consensus must be queried: in a department that always insisted on professionalism, why would

anyone accept a play without a title from an author without a name? Equally, Rose recommended dramatisations of Brontë and Twain when the BBC has never accepted unsolicited dramatisations. His opinion was clearly so far out of kilter with the rest of the department as to be simply irrelevant. Gielgud and the Script Unit, on the other hand, were predominantly of one mind and, significantly, agreed with the Observer.

Though the report contains no recommendations or conclusions, the impression given was that current staff members could recognise broadcastable material but that the “outside” readers, particularly Rose, were unreliable in their opinions. In forwarding the report to Lindsay Wellington, Gielgud commented, “I fancy that where there was disagreement between the outside readers and the staff readers it was largely due to the fact that the outside readers were less up to date, as is natural, in their knowledge of the type of material for which we are looking...” and accepted that the answer was the formation of a larger Central Script Unit “for the first preliminary ‘sieving’ operation of rejecting work that is absolutely impossible.”²⁴

The services of Rose and Burnham were dispensed with. Lance Sieveking’s post of Special Play Adaptor was elevated to Head of the Script Section and Barbara Bray was appointed Script Editor. Kate Whitehead summarises the resultant change of ethos: “The new Script Section received all the unsolicited plays and therefore formed an important link between the young unknown writer and the BBC as a whole.”²⁵ For the first time since 1929 a writer committed to experimentation was in a position to shape the future of British radio drama.

11.5 Conclusions

Fernald’s reports were more likely to influence play selection and production than Brown’s if for no greater reason than that postwar radio drama was so different in scale and range than the severely limited service of 1942. Both Brown and Fernald agreed, however, on the need to shift the balance of radio drama from adapted stage plays and dramatised novels to original work. The investigation into the process of play reading that followed Fernald’s second report revealed the obstacles that hindered the progress of new writers of original plays. The creation of a central unit that only read scripts led.

in the second half of the 1950s, to a situation where original work was the norm and BBC radio the place ambitious new writers learned their craft.

References

¹ Joint letter from the Head of Drama (Sound), the Head of Features, the Head of Music Programmes (Sound) and the Head of Variety to the Director of Sound Broadcasting, dated February 10 1956 and headed "Streamlining". (WAC R34/1022/1) Policy, Future of Sound Broadcasting in the Domestic Services Working Party

² Minutes of Control Board meeting October 5 1926 (WAC R3/3/2) Control Board Minutes 1926

³ Ivor Brown, "BBC DRAMA, Mid-March to Mid-May 1942", p. 1 (WAC R19/276) Entertainment, Drama Department 1924-1948

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ *Ibid* pp 2-3

⁷ *Ibid* p. 3

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ *Ibid* p. 4

¹⁰ John Fernald (undated), "Report on plays from 'Saturday Night Theatre' and 'Curtain Up' during February – June 1952" p1 (WAC R19/280/6 Drama Policy File 5a 1949-52)

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 4

¹⁵ Fernald, "Home Service and Third Programme Drama", April 22 1953, p. 1 (WAC R19/280/7 Drama Policy File 5b 1953-4)

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 5

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 6

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 8

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 9

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 10

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 8

²² Val Gielgud, "Mr Howard Rose and Miss Barbara Burnham", July 3 1953, (WAC R19/280/7) Entertainment, Drama Policy, File 5B 1953-1954

²³ (WAC R19/280/7) Entertainment, Drama Policy, File 5B 1953-1954

²⁴ Gielgud to Wellington, October 22 1953, (WAC R19/280/7) Entertainment, Drama Policy, File 5B 1953-1954

²⁵ Whitehead 1989: 32

Chapter 12: Radio drama in the television age

12.1 Introduction

For BBC radio drama, the end of expansion can be dated precisely, to the second week of May 1956, when a retrospective of classic radio plays coincided with the premiere of *Look Back in Anger* at the Royal Court. British radio was already in retreat following the arrival in the UK of commercial television in 1955 and would continue to diminish for the next decade. Radio drama, however, reacted to the twin challenge of television and the theatrical New Wave proactively, inviting the Angry Young Men into the broadcasting establishment and developing at least one new genre which mirrored and indeed popularised the most radical of the new stage forms.

Effectively there were two tranches of new radio dramatists, those who found an audience on radio and went on to achieve stage success, and those who migrated to television in the 1960s. Three leading lights of the first group – Harold Pinter, John Arden and David Rudkin – returned to radio when their ideas outstripped the restrictions of even the state-subsidised theatre. Arden's *Pearl* (1978) is the case study in this chapter, partly because it achieves a synthesis of theatre and acoustic drama, partly because it is proposed as the last 'event' drama on British radio. That a radio play could be acknowledged as a cultural milestone at a time when television was undoubtedly the primary dramatic medium, it is argued, is one reason why the form continues to flourish thirty years later with the single drama virtual extinct on television.

12.2 Gielgud's swansong

Although Gielgud remained in post until April 28 1963, his sixty-third birthday,¹ his swansong was effectively the series of Classic Radio Plays which ran between May 7 and May 18 1956.² The series showcased the achievements of the radio form, many of which were of course Gielgud's achievements. The plays selected were *Danger*, *The Squirrel's Cage*, *Socrates Asks Why*, *Wade's Oranges and Lemons*, *The March of the*

'45, *The Dark Tower*, *Money With Menaces*, *The Rescue* and *The Homecoming* by Peter Hirche, a German *hörspiel* that had won the 1955 RAI Prize.³

The series was also intended to demonstrate radio's artistic superiority over television – not BBC television as it had existed since the war, which was never remotely equal to postwar BBC radio, save perhaps in the coverage of sports,^a but the commercial interloper. Despite the celebrated upstaging of ITV's opening night by sacrificing Grace Fairbrother to the burning barn in *The Archers*, by 1956 the Light Programme audience – so big that it supported everything else – was migrating to television. This was the audience that would never return, whereas the Home Service would keep much of its audience and the audience for the Third was so small and so devoted that it could never be lost. If the BBC was to retain its dominance of British culture then it had to do so in television, which meant cutbacks in sound-only broadcasting, which in turn meant cutbacks in the more expensive departments such as Drama. The single play strands on the Light would progressively be replaced with sitcoms that could be shared with television; soaps and serials would move, by and large, to the Home Service; and the Third would be, to borrow Henry Reed's phrase, "rudely castrated"^b, most drastically in terms of drama and speech.

Lindsay Wellington's Chief Assistant, Richard Marriott chaired the Working Party into the Future of Sound Broadcasting which reported to Governors in January 1957. The axe fell heaviest on the Third Programme which, even before television made any sort of impact, never attracted more than 2% of the total radio audience.⁴ By February 1958, according a report by the Sound Broadcasting Society, the Third had lost 22% of its drama.⁵

If the outlook for radio as a whole was held to be grim, for drama it seemed the end was imminent. The day after the first of the Classic Radio Plays went to air British drama underwent a seismic upheaval with the premiere of *Look Back in Anger* at the

^a Take for example the schedule for Friday April 1955. Viewing began at 3pm with *War in the Air*, followed at 3.30 by *Sportsview* and at 5.00 by children's programming. The weather was at 7.25, *Newsreel* at 7.30. At 7.45 *The Grove* Family launched the evening, followed by Wilfred Pickles at 8.00. At 8.45 Mr Gaitskill gave the Opposition response to the Budget, 9.00 saw *Music with a Difference* with *Asian Club* at 9.30 and the *Story of the Royal Corps of Signals* at 10.00. The evening ended at 10.30 with the news in sound only (*The Times*, Friday April 22 1955, pg. 8).

^b See Chapter 9.

Royal Court. Though Osborne himself would always remain a writer for the stage, others who would be bundled with him as 'Angry Young Men' would find and develop their voice on radio. John Arden won a regional prize in 1956 and Harold Pinter – in the long term the most successful of them all – was invited to write for the Third when *The Birthday Party* closed the same week it opened at the Lyric Hammersmith in 1958.

12.3 Intimations of the absurd

McWhinnie's decision to commission a play from Pinter without waiting for critical or commercial endorsement was a major change of policy for the Drama Department. Whilst Beckett was clearly more overtly experimental, he had probably been the most famous living playwright when McWhinnie commissioned *All That Fall*, whereas Pinter was commissioned immediately after *The Birthday Party* had ignominiously "come a cropper."⁶ At the time, however, Pinter's writing was still heavily influenced by Beckett, a factor which no doubt sparked McWhinnie's interest.

And, as Beckett had done, Pinter devised a thoroughly radiogenic play. *A Slight Ache*^c begins with deceptive realism: Edward and Flora in a bland suburban limbo with nothing better to occupy their time than plotting the death of a wasp in the breakfast marmalade. This numbing mundanity springboards into the absurd when Edward spots the matchseller at the back gate: "He's back again."⁷ And so the game begins:

EDWARD: What in God's name is he doing with a tray full of matches at half past nine in the morning?

FLORA: He arrives at seven o'clock.

EDWARD: Seven o'clock?

FLORA: He's always there at seven.

EDWARD: Yes, but you've never ... actually seen him arrive?

FLORA: No, I...

EDWARD: Well, how do you know he's ... not been standing there all night?
[Pinter 1961: 15]

The matchseller becomes a threat because the one thing Edward and Flora agree upon is that he is harmless. He becomes the "an object in relation to which they act out

^c Third Programme, July 29 1959

their own insecurities and dissatisfactions”⁸ but we never hear him speak and, of course, we can never be sure if he really exists. The drama is entirely in the ambiguity.

Given Pinter’s subsequent success, *A Slight Ache* has inevitably been done on the stage with the inevitable problem identified by W Stephen Gilbert in a 1973 review: “The view that *A Slight Ache* should never have ventured beyond radio is not fully rebutted by this production which, like the earlier visible productions, has a cast 50% larger than the original cast.”⁹

Although Pinter was influenced by the Absurd, *A Slight Ache* does not fully belong to the Theatre of the Absurd which, according to Martin Esslin, who coined the term, “tends towards a radical devaluation of language, toward a poetry that is to emerge from the concrete and objectified images of the stage itself.”¹⁰ Absurdism is characters buried up to their necks in urns in Beckett’s *Play* (1963) or bedevilled by singing ‘speak-your-weight’ machines in N F Simpson’s *One Way Pendulum* (1959). Language is never devalued in Pinter – the matchseller exists only in the language of others. Thus what Pinter began with *A Slight Ache* was a radio form of the Absurd in which naturalism is knocked out of kilter by the bizarre. Frances Gray recognises this: “Radio’s habit of building up realities only to knock them from under the listener’s feet made it an excellent medium for the distinctive nature of British absurdism.”¹¹ Pinter himself did not advance the form in his other radio plays, *A Night Out*^d and *The Dwarfs*^e, but it became the signature of the most prolific and successful radio dramatist of the period, Giles Cooper.

Cooper was a failing actor and fledgling stage dramatist^f who initially got into the BBC via his brother-in-law, Douglas Cleverdon.¹² His first script for the Third was the dramatisation of *The Lord of the Flies* (1955), which led to a commission for *Mathry Beacon*, a pitch-black comedy in which a group of military low achievers continue guarding an ineffective V2 rocket deflector long after the war ends.^g

^d Third Programme, March 1 1960

^e Third Programme, December 2 1960

^f *Never Get Out* was produced at the Gateway theatre in 1950 (Taylor 1977: 26)

^g June 18 1956, produced by McWhinnie

More typical of Cooper's style was *Under the Loofah Tree* which was revived in 2006 to mark the fortieth anniversary of Cooper's death.^h Edward is enjoying his twice-weekly bath; despite interruptions from his wife, son and an encyclopaedia salesman, he relives a life of disappointment through a fantasised *This Is Your Life*. McWhinnie produced the original and recalled, in his introduction to the 1966 BBC collection of Cooper's plays, "This is radio at its virtuoso best: forty-five minutes of highly distilled experience crystallized into a sound-complex; words, rhythms, evocative noises, fused into a king of musical score which constantly stimulates the ear and the imagination."¹³

Cooper went on to make a considerable reputation with his television dramatisations of the *Maigret* stories. Both McWhinnie and Irving Wardle¹⁴ link Cooper with John Mortimer, whose *The Dock Brief*ⁱ won the RAI Prize in 1957 and who went on to great television success. Cooper and Mortimer both occupied a grey area between art and entertainment; both, significantly, also wrote for the Light Programme's *Radio Theatre*^j and both featured in the 1961-1962 retrospective series *From the Fifties*. Indeed, *The Dock Brief* is the *only* radio original featured in a series which, with the customary BBC sense of inferiority regarding its in-house product, comprised adapted stage plays, films, dramatised novels and even, in Cooper's *Dangerous Word*, an adapted television script previously produced by ITV.^k

<i>From the Fifties</i> – Home Service/Third Programme series October 1961 to March 1962			
<i>The Cocktail Party</i>	T S Eliot	Home	Adapted stage play
<i>Saint's Day</i>	John Whiting	Third	Adapted stage play
<i>The Love of Four Colonels</i>	Peter Ustinov	Home	Adapted stage play
<i>Nekrassov</i>	Jean-Paul Sartre	Third	Adapted stage play
<i>A Sleep of Prisoners</i>	Christopher Fry	Home	Adapted stage play
<i>Cards of Identity</i>	Nigel Dennis	Third	Adapted stage play ^l
<i>Hurry on Down</i>	John Wain	Home	Dramatised novel
<i>Pincher Martin</i>	William Golding	Third	Dramatised novel
<i>Lucky Jim</i>	Kingsley Amis	Home	Dramatised novel
<i>The Hostage</i>	Brendan Behan	Third	Adapted stage play
<i>Variation on a Theme</i>	Terence Rattigan	Home	Adapted stage play
<i>The Lark</i>	Jean Anouilh	Third	Adapted stage play
<i>A Taste of Honey</i>	Shelagh Delaney	Home	Adapted stage play

^h Afternoon Theatre, R4, February 7 2006, produced by Martin Jenkins.

ⁱ Third Programme, May 16 1957

^j See Chapter 9.

^k *Armchair Theatre* (1958), produced by Sydney Newman.

^l The stage play was a dramatisation of the author's novel.

<i>The Caucasian Chalk Circle</i>	Bertolt Brecht	Third	Adapted stage play
<i>The Queen and the Rebels</i>	Ugo Betti	Home	Adapted stage play
<i>The Bald Prima Donna/The Lesson</i>	Eugene Ionesco	Third	Adapted stage plays
<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Samuel Beckett	Home	Adapted stage play
<i>Orphée</i>	Jean Cocteau	Third	Adapted film
<i>Dangerous Word</i>	Giles Cooper	Home	Adapted TV play
<i>The Seventh Seal</i>	Ingmar Bergman	Third	Adapted film ^m
<i>Look Back in Anger</i>	John Osborne	Home	Adapted stage play
<i>Serjeant Musgrave's Dance</i>	John Arden	Third	Adapted stage play
<i>The Dock Brief</i>	John Mortimer	Home	Radio play
<i>A Resounding Tinkle</i>	N F Simpson	Third	Adapted stage play
<i>The Caretaker</i>	Harold Pinter	Home	Adapted stage play

12.4 Martin Esslin and the radio plays of Tom Stoppard

Andrew Crisell has identified 1964 as “the nadir of BBC sound broadcasting.”¹⁵ Laurence Gilliam died that year and the Features Department died with him. “Back in the 1920s and 1930s,” Crisell writes, “features had been radio’s programme laboratory, the place in which it had tried to create its own unique genre. Its closure seemed to have dark implications for the medium in general.”¹⁶

For radio drama, however, 1963 marked something of a rebirth. Gielgud retired in April and was replaced by Martin Esslin. On the face of it, the choice of the third Head of Radio Drama was as arbitrary as the second. Esslin was a Hungarian who had only joined the Drama Department in 1959. He was, however, a drama academic, the author of defining studies of the New Wave, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils* (1959) and *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1962). Under Esslin and his deputy, Michael Bakewell, radio drama entered a new age of creativity, mirroring the radical changes taking place on the contemporary stage and bringing the new dramatists everybody was talking about into homes nationwide. At the same time Esslin and Bakewell nurtured writers who had not yet tackled the public stage, such as Caryl Churchill, Joe Orton and, particularly, Tom Stoppard.

Before finding international success with his stage play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967), Stoppard was a prolific writer for radio, penning

^m The film was loosely based on Bergman’s 1954 radio play *Träsmålning*.

seventy episodes of the World Service serial *A Student's Diary: An Arab in London* and five, apparently unused, episodes of *Mrs Dale's Diary*. Interestingly, Stoppard wrote no significant single plays for radio before his breakthrough on the stage; unusually, however, he more than repaid the Drama Department's support by continuing to write original plays for radio *after* he became a major theatrical figure.

Stoppard is to modern drama what Dali was to modern art, using brilliant technique to render the shock of the new commercially viable. This is not a shortcoming – Stoppard's popular success with pastiche avant-garde is likely most people's *entrée* to the real thing and, in fairness, his later plays successfully subordinate method to theme.ⁿ In radio, however, Stoppard's work is the apogee of what might be called English Everyday Absurd, the signature of Esslin's fourteen years as Head of Drama.

In *Albert's Bridge*,^o for example, the first of Stoppard's major original plays for radio, he replaces Beckett's urns with the real life absurdity of men endlessly painting a huge suspension bridge and uses it to explore the horror of the term redundancy which in 1967 was only just entering common usage. *Artist Descending a Staircase*^p plays with time and artistic theory but 'regularises' the three artists by making them three superannuated infants sharing a garret and squabbling over the marmalade.

DONNER: I am trying to open your eyes to the nakedness of your emperor.

BEAUCHAMP: But Donner, ever since I've known you you've been running around asking for the name of his tailor – symbolism, surrealism, imagism, vorticism, fauvism, cubism – dada, drip-action, hard-edge, pop, found objects and post-object – it's only a matter of days since you spent the entire housekeeping on sugar to make an edible Venus de Milo...

[Stoppard 1973: 22]

Artist Descending is radio-referential as well as radiogenic. Beauchamp is an acoustic artist: "If I had one good man placed high up in the BBC my tape would become art for millions, in time."¹⁷ His tapes are direct descendants of *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), written by Beckett, the master of High Radio Art; the fly he is trying to record, and the marmalade, reference the wasp in the marmalade of *A Slight Ache*: the

ⁿ *Indian Ink* (1995), for example, which began as the radio play *In the Native State* (1991), is about British imperialism and the relationship between occupants and occupiers.

^o Third Programme, July 13 1967, produced by Charles Lefeaux.

^p Radio 3, November 14 1972, produced by John Tydeman

artists' lost shared love, Sophie Farthingale, is the quintessential radio character in that she is blind.

The title is a pun on Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912), a fusion of cubism and futurism in which all the elements of the titular movement are broken down and superimposed. The artist who descends is Donner, who has fallen or been pushed downstairs to his death in present time, an event recorded on tape by Beauchamp who nevertheless denies culpability. The events leading up to the fall – a lifetime of events from 1914 to the present – are broken down and reassembled like Duchamp's nude. A signature of radio drama is the ability to slide across time; it is however extraordinarily difficult to do so repeatedly and out of logical sequence. In a celebrated Note to the 1973 text Stoppard explains his structure:

The play begins in the here-and-now; the next five scenes are each a flashback from the previous scene; the seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth and eleventh scenes are, respectively, continuations of the fifth, fourth, third, second and first. So the play is set temporally in six parts, in the sequence ABCDEFEDCBA.

[Stoppard 1973: 11]

A is the present, B a couple of hours ago, C last week, D 1922, E 1920 and F 1914. To further complicate matters there is a seventh time which Stoppard doesn't describe in his Note: tape-time, the tape loop of Donner's fall, which exists contemporaneously with the here-and-now.

Stoppard is the best known and most popular of the writers nurtured by Esslin's Drama Department, but there were countless others. Although radio as a whole shrank with the arrival of commercial television, drama transformed itself into a creative hothouse, more overtly artistic and experimental than television and more progressive than the contemporary stage.

Before 1956 radio drama had been an ancillary activity for most of its writers: Hughes, Berkeley and Hamilton were stage dramatists; Guthrie, Sieveking and Gielgud were producers, and Wade a busy actor. After 1956, as Alan Plater has noted,¹⁸ the professional dramatist building a career operated across all media in a way never before possible and more often than not started in radio.

This fundamental change of focus, from inviting plays from established professionals to supporting new writing, is a major reason for the survival of BBC radio drama into the 21st century. Equally significant was the way in which writers who had gone on to tremendous success in the theatre returned to radio when their ideas outgrew the stage. Pinter premiered *Landscape* on radio in 1968 rather than placate the Lord Chamberlain by cutting “fuck all” from the stage text¹⁹; Rudkin reinvented the dramatic feature for *Casement’s Bones* and when Arden effectively went on strike from the legitimate theatre (a withdrawal of labour which continues into its fourth decade) he returned to radio with the metadrama *Pearl*.

12.5 Case study: “Pearl” (1978)

The most striking thing about the premiere of *Pearl*, given its content and context, was that Alfred Bradley’s production went out on the middlebrow channel, Radio 4.⁹ Set against a background of the English in Ireland, it is also a play about the corruption of drama, reflecting the author’s own treatment at the hands of that most liberal of state-sponsored ensembles the Royal Shakespeare Company. Almost thirty years later, this latter seems trivial but at the time Arden and D’Arcy’s strike action over the RSC production of their Arthurian trilogy *The Island of the Mighty* sparked a national debate over the issue of who controls the meaning of the play in production, the author or the director. Arden’s own view was that:

Only the playwright can understand the *meaning* of a new, unperformed play. He may not understand it all that well, but when it comes to improving defects in the structure, no one else can be certain what the structure is intended to express. The business of *interpretation* (i.e. *how* the meaning is presented on the stage) is the department of the director. [Arden 1977: 160]

Because of the way he believed he was treated by the RSC, Arden vowed he would never again write for the legitimate theatre and he never has. Arden was one of the most discussed playwrights of his generation; his plays are modern classics, long since on the school curriculum, but – determinedly uncommercial – could only ever have been

⁹ July 3 1978

produced on the state-subsidised stage. This then was the extent of the sacrifice Arden, in his early 40s, made for his principles and, many thought at the time, for his muse, his wife and collaborator Margaretta D'Arcy. D'Arcy did not collaborate on *Pearl* but she is, unmistakeably, the protean Pearl, muse of Arden's persona, the Yorkshire playwright Tom Backhouse.

Pearl is a play superficially about the English in Ireland, set in the period immediately before the Irish rebellion of 1641, eleven years into Charles I's Personal Rule. In production, much of the Irish material was cut, as David Wade noted in his review for *The Times*:

A play such as this invites the search for parallels and they are there, though fewer than they might have been if, on the evidence of the script I saw, some early scenes had not been quite severely cut. These cuts seem to have been applied chiefly to the Irish background and may explain why in performance this appeared peripheral as well as rather hard to understand.²⁰

That Arden accepted the cuts shows that Ireland was only intended as the context which gives relevance to the real theme of the play, political interference with the political playwright.

The play opens with a rough and ready performance of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* – a play about tyranny – in a rowdy northern hall. We encounter Pearl in internal monologue. "So this then is the King's England: all my life I have heard them talk of it, and here for the first time I sit."²¹ Thus we learn, immediately, that she is not English but an outsider. This is confirmed when she tells us that she is sitting with the bawd, Mother Bumroll.

The performance is interrupted by the local puritan, who denounces the play and players – "This mendacious false testimony by persons upon a stage to be other than God made them is obnoxious to the integrity of the Children of God!"²² Parson Sowse stands up for the Established Church, Backhouse and his patron Lord Grimscar for the theatricals. The evening degenerates into rioting and hymns. Pearl is bundled away to Bumroll's brothel where Sowse soon arrives to collect her.

Pearl, it turns out, is not a whore but a messenger who has been smuggled from Ireland with an important message for Lord Grimscar. While Sowse sates his

“immediate carnal need” with “fat Alice or perhaps Betty with the bad teeth”,²³ Pearl changes. We are given hints that she may be black – her hair, under the whore’s wig, is short, “like charcoal”; she strips “to my brown skin”.²⁴ She thus becomes the dangerous, exotic outsider.

At Grimscar Hall Pearl delivers her message. The chief of the O’Neills, Owen Roe, seeks support for an uprising in Ireland against the royalist Deputy Strafford. Grimscar, an opponent of royal autocracy, nevertheless demurs at siding with Irish Catholics. Pearl takes supper at the hall with Backhouse. She reveals her past. Amongst her many other adventures, Pearl has been an actress “in those parts of the world where it is permitted to females.”²⁵ D’Arcy, it almost goes without saying, was an actress when she and Arden met.

In another part of the hall, Grimscar dines with his mistress Belladonna whose purpose, literally, is to seduce him into rejoining the King’s party. To draw him to London, Belladonna offers to commission a play. Backhouse, naturally, will write it. She asks Grimscar, “Are there not so many new glories of the art of Roscius you have longed for years to introduce? For example, out of Italy, the use of women upon the stage?”²⁶

Backhouse fondly imagines that “‘The Brave Deeds of Godly Queen Esther for the Salvation of her People Israel’”²⁷ will rouse the audience to rise up against the tyranny of the King and his Deputy, but Belladonna infiltrates her agent Captain Catso into the company to spy on Pearl, who is to play the lead. Backhouse’s enemy, however, is the actor-producer Barnabas, who subverts the text:

BARNABAS: You know the title has been changed? It is now called ‘The Tragedy of Haman and his Contentious Rebellion against the Commands of the King of Persia’. What I might term the balancing-point of the whole play has been shifted---

GRIMSCAR: Without alteration to the text?

BARNABAS: Without alteration, so far: more a matter of the emphasis of the production, my lord. But I believe it will require certain loppings and prunings the better to consolidate it. [Arden 1979: 59]

This, of course, is precisely what Arden held that David Jones of the RSC has done to *Island of the Mighty*. As Jones blamed the breakdown of relations with Arden on the arrival from Ireland of D'Arcy, so Barnabas seeks to exclude Pearl.

BARNABAS: ... I am aware it is delicate. The young woman, your – your friend, she has withal such a tight-mouthed and uncomfortable spirit – she – she –

BACKHOUSE (*ominous*): Aye? And she what?

BARNABAS (*with a nervous gulp*): If she is not capable of the full intensity of the part, then the part is too large for her and the public will fall asleep. So it must be cut.
[Arden 1979: 61]

Backhouse retaliates by secretly writing an epilogue in which Pearl, changed from her Esther costume into “black gown, white starched collar”,²⁸ will denounce by name the oppressors of English freedom.

The action of the ‘play’ fades in and out as Arden focuses instead on the thoughts of the audience. Belladonna and her cousin the Duchess are literally present at the performance whereas Backhouse and Grimscar seem to be at a distance, recalling or reporting the event. Pearl occupies a complex middle ground. In what Gray describes as “an alienation effect of shattering force that is peculiarly radiophonic”,²⁹ she is in the immediate action of both plays: “The flats close... I am behind them, my new costume laid out to my hand – ”.³⁰ Because she uses the present tense, the audience experiences what happens next through Pearl’s sensibilities. She is in the middle of her quick change, half-naked; the rest of her clothes fall down as Catso drags her out on stage. She stands “totally and shamefully exposed in the glare of the candles”,³¹ a visual, theatrical image rendered more powerful because we must imagine what we cannot see and – Arden’s masterstroke – because Pearl does not speak, does not tell us how she feels at the climactic moment.

At the time, critics understood Arden’s metaphor. David Wade, for example, wrote, “Mr Arden might be tempted to describe his own experience as a playwright in those desperate terms.”³² Frances Gray, writing four years later, saw in *Pearl* a successful marriage of message and medium: “Arden has succeeded in creating a play about public issues, a play on a large scale, which works perfectly within its medium ... He does so by using the intimacy of the microphone to involve us closely in a process of creation.”³³

Arden has continued to write radio plays.¹ He explained the attraction for him of the radio form in 1982: “Skilled radio actors can project personalities that have absolutely no resemblance to their own size and shape. It is the author’s task to make clear to them, from the size and shape of the words alone exactly what these personalities are to be...”³⁴ For Arden, radio drama is first and foremost the province of the writer.

12.6 Conclusions

Although radio as a whole shrank with the arrival of television for the mass audience, radio drama flourished in the 1960s and 1970s. The retirement of Gielgud and the appointment of Esslin marked a shift in the nature of the form, from sideline activity for established theatrical professionals to proving ground for new writing. The success of the new strategy is proved by the way in which writers like Stoppard and Arden continued to write for radio after having achieved stage success.

There have been thousands of new radio plays since *Pearl* in 1978, some great and a handful significant. Crook makes a strong case for Lee Hall’s *Spoonface Steinberg* (1997),³⁵ which certainly enjoyed considerable crossover success, and Guralnick argues in favour of Howard Barker’s *Scenes from an Execution* (1984) in which a talking Sketchbook describes the creative processes behind the female Venetian painter Galactica’s commemorative painting of the Battle of Lepanto.

Pearl, however, can be said to be the last ‘event’ radio play. It was the cultural highlight of June and July 1978, discussed in the broadsheets for weeks before it aired and was widely reviewed thereafter.⁵ *Pearl* was an event not because of the quality of the writing – although the reputation of the writer was a factor – but because its theme was embedded in the contemporary cultural context. Revived today it would still be a great radio play but, stripped of its context, would it still be an event?

¹ These include *To Put it Frankly* (1979), a two part dramatisation of *Don Quixote* (1980), *Garland for a Hoar Head* (1982), *The Manchester Enthusiasts* (a collaboration with D’Arcy, 1984), *A Suburban Suicide* (1994) and *Wild Ride to Dublin* and *Poor Tom, Thy Horn is Dry* (both 2003).

⁵ For example, ITV’s *South Bank Show* devoted half a programme to the production the week before the broadcast [“Radio”, David Wade, *The Times*, Saturday July 1 1978, pg 6]. See also Page 1985: 63-64

References

- ¹ Gielgud 1965: 7
- ² *The Times*, Friday April 20 1956 pg 3
- ³ *Ibid*
- ⁴ Crisell 1997: 132
- ⁵ "Is the BBC's Bid for Increased Popularity Worth the Sacrifices?", *The Times*, February 11 1958 p. 3
- ⁶ Esslin 1973: 18
- ⁷ Pinter 1961: 15
- ⁸ Taylor 1977: 331
- ⁹ *Plays and Players*, Vol 21, No 3, Issue 243, December 1973, p. 52
- ¹⁰ Esslin 1974: 7
- ¹¹ Frances Gray, "The nature of radio drama" in Lewis 1981: 61
- ¹² Carpenter 1996: 149
- ¹³ Cooper 1966: 10
- ¹⁴ Wardle 1968: 7
- ¹⁵ Crisell 1997: 133
- ¹⁶ Crisell 1997: 133
- ¹⁷ Stoppard 1973: 21
- ¹⁸ See his 'Note on the Media' in Bradley 1973: viii
- ¹⁹ Esslin 1973: 30 – the offending occurrence can be found at Pinter 1970: 28
- ²⁰ Radio, *The Times*, July 8 1978 pg 6
- ²¹ Arden 1979: 9
- ²² Arden 1979: 14
- ²³ Arden 1979: 23
- ²⁴ Arden 1979: 24
- ²⁵ Arden 1979: 36
- ²⁶ Arden 1979: 40
- ²⁷ Arden 1979: 47
- ²⁸ Arden 1979: 65
- ²⁹ Gray 1982: 151
- ³⁰ Arden 1979: 72
- ³¹ Arden 1979: 73
- ³² Radio, *The Times*, July 8 1978 pg 6
- ³³ Gray 1982: 147
- ³⁴ Arden, "Plays in the Theatre of the Mind", *Sunday Times*, August 22 1982, quoted in Page 1985: 92
- ³⁵ British Radio Drama – a Cultural History (1999), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/1/1/19990701.shtml>

Chapter 13: Avant-garde radio drama

13.1 Introduction

In a sense every play written in the first decade of radio drama was an experiment but plays like *Zauberie auf dem Sender* and *Kaleidoscope* were additionally conceived in terms of the avant-garde artistic movements of their day, Dadaism and Futurism respectively. Artistic caprice lost general appeal after the Crash of 1929 and for the next decade-and-a-half the avant-garde operated outside the mainstream and tended to concern themselves with technology rather than content. Brecht's *Der Flug der Lindberghs*, for example, prefigured 21st century experiments in interactivity as early as 1929 and F T Marinetti proposed a radiophonic synthesis in the manifesto *La Radia* (1933).^a

Today the radio avant-garde operates in two forms, experimental drama and acoustic art, which share a common ancestor in Artaud's extraordinary exercise in glossolalia *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu*, the case study in this chapter, commissioned and banned by RTF in 1948. Thereafter the French national broadcaster limited its acoustic experimentation to music, with Pierre Schaeffer's *Club d'Essai*. Schaeffer, however, inspired young German radio artists like Paul Pörtner to create the New *Hörspiel* that supplanted the modernist *hörspiel* tradition begun by Borchert but which nevertheless remained distinctly drama.^b Meanwhile, Roger Blin, who had acted in *Pour en finir*, became the mentor of the as-yet-unperformed Samuel Beckett, who followed the relatively conventional *All That Fall* with a series of words-versus-music experiments for the BBC.

BBC radio drama no longer favours the avant-garde. It has, however, provided the platform for the first experiments in interactive radio drama, discussion of which concludes this chapter.

^a See Tisdall and Bozzolla 1977: 199

^b As opposed to *O-Ton*, the German tradition of real-sound collage – see John J White, *Hörspiel: FRG* in Sandford 1999: 300.

13.2 Brecht: “Der flug der Lindberghs”

Experiments with sound very like the acoustical art being created today actually predate public radio. The German collagist Kurt Schwitters, for example, began his abstract sound work with *Sonata in Urläten* and *Ursonate* in 1921. As Duchamp made a fountain out of a *pissoir*, so Schwitters made an orchestra of his voicebox.

The young Bertolt Brecht had no interest in caprice. His only significant work for radio was *Der Flug der Lindberghs*^c with music by Weill and Hindemith. Ironically, where Schwitters’ experiment led in part to *musique concrète*, Brecht’s experiment grew from the *Neue Musik*, being technically Weill’s entry in the New Music Festival held at Baden-Baden in July 1929.¹

Der Flug is *Gemeinschaftsmusik* (Community Music) in that its performance is a communal undertaking between musicians, actors and audience. It is *Lehrstück*, a purely didactic work, written for instruction not pleasure. Brecht seeks “a paedagogical effect”² and intended the play to be broadcast to children in the classroom. His main aim, however, was to change the way radio was used.

Der Flug der Lindberghs is not intended to be of use to the present-day radio but to alter it. The increasing concentration of mechanical means and the increasingly specialized training – tendencies that should be accelerated – call for a kind of resistance by the listener, and for his mobilization and redrafting as a producer. [Brecht 1964: 32]

Brecht seems to have told The New York Times in 1935 that “The radio broadcast into the schools the accompanying orchestra music and solo parts, while the classes in the schools sang the choruses and did the minor roles.”³ The translation is clearly at fault here. Brecht may have described what he wanted to happen but there are no minor roles in either the 1929 or 1950 texts and only one non-broadcast chorus. The 1950 version was certainly broadcast (by South German Radio) but the Baden-Baden

^c He also wrote the irregular verse of his *German Satires* for German Freedom Radio operating from Czechoslovakia in the late 1930s (Brecht 1964 p. 120) and wrote the play with music *The Trial of Lucullus* (1939) – later the opera *The Condemnation of Lucullus* (1951) – for Stockholm Radio but his contract was cancelled – see Hans Peter Obermeyer, ““Yes, to Nothingness!”: *The Condemnation of Lucullus* – An Opera of Peace by Bertolt Brecht and Paul Dessau”, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Fall 2001, pp. 217–233.

performance was a “public rehearsal”, which may or may not have been broadcast as a demonstration of radio’s potential.^d

In both texts those elements delivered by radio are identified parenthetically. Abstract concepts and inanimate objects are sung and broadcast: New York City, Fogbank, Snowstorm, Sleep, America and Europe. Lindbergh is not broadcast.^e Lindbergh is the “paedagogical” part, sometimes read from a text, sometimes sung from a score, but always “mechanically”.⁴

LINDBERGH *speaks*:

Those are fishing-boats

They’ll know

Where the island is.

Hey, where

Is England?

FISHERMEN (RADIO):

I heard someone shout.

Who would be shouting?

Something’s humming

In the air!

What can be humming?

[Brecht 1997: 16]

In a sense Brecht was pioneering interactive radio drama and thus prefigures the work of Nick Fisher and Mike Walker seventy years later. But interactivity as it stands today is a secondary process limited to the way in which, or the level to which, the listener experiences the narrative. Brecht allows no interactivity with the narrative but encourages the listener to become part of the performance, to empathise with the hero by being the hero. That is more than interactivity but less than collaboration. It is the dramatic equivalent of *Gemeinschaftsmusik*, a communal enactment.

^d Certainly, this is the only performance that Brecht mentions in his well-known article “The Radio as an apparatus of Communication” (1932) and describes in his 1929 “Notes to *Der Flug der Lindberghs*” Cory, on the other hand, believes that *Lindberghs* was “presented at the Baden-Baden Music Festival in 1929 and broadcast on that occasion over every station in Germany, save Munich.” (Kahn and Whitehead 1994: 344)

^e Despite the title, there is only one Lindbergh. During the writing process Brecht concluded that to make a hero of an individual was not ideologically sound – see Introduction to Brecht 1997: xii. He later eliminated the name altogether (renaming the play *Der Ozeanflug*) because Lindbergh was a Nazi sympathiser (*Ibid*, 209).

13.3 Artaud: “Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu”

Antonin Artaud was the most extreme of the surrealists. Susan Sontag calls him “one of the last great exemplars of literary modernism.”⁵ Where Dali and Buñuel played games in the subconscious, Artaud was genuinely insane, his schizophrenia exacerbated by his art.

Radio drama was his last hope and his final humiliation. In 1946 Artaud returned to Paris having spent eight years in various asylums following a disastrous breakdown in Dublin. His most significant work, *Le Théâtre et son double*, had made him famous in his absence.⁶ He performed for a select public at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier in January 1947 and on the basis of this lecture-cum-reading-cum-rant he was commissioned to write a piece for Fernand Pouey’s series *La Voix des poètes* on Radiodiffusion Française. Artaud responded enthusiastically, finding in radio “an alternative and concrete means for exploring the aesthetics of cruelty and so exceeding the physical limitations of space/time.”⁷ He wrote the text for *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu* in a fortnight⁸ and the piece was recorded with readings by Artaud himself and the actors Maria Casarès, Roger Blin and Paule Thévenin.

It goes without saying, this was not a play in the usual sense, nor a reading, nor a work of autobiography, though at intervals throughout Artaud raises direct questions about his mental state.^f

---You are raving, Mr Artaud.
You are mad.

---I am not raving.
I am not mad.
I tell you they have reinvented microbes in order to impose
a new idea of god. [Artaud 1976: 569]

Sontag defines Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty as “the place where the body would be reborn in thought and thought would be reborn in the body.”⁹ On radio Artaud was able to completely liberate language from the flesh. To Artaud, the broadcast of *Pour en*

^f See also Chapter 16.

finir, scheduled for February 2 1948, was to be the culmination of his life's work: "not only would the broadcast be the latest and fullest manifestation of 'The Theatre of Cruelty' but it would also allow Artaud, for the first time in his life, to reach a mass audience."¹⁰

RTF, too, thought Artaud's work would be a considerable coup and advertised the premiere widely. Certain elements of the press knew Artaud's history and heard rumours about his subject matter. A scandal was fomented and in response to the brouhaha the Director-General of RTF, Wladimir Porché, listened to the recording on Sunday February 1. The broadcast was cancelled forthwith on the grounds that it was anti-American and anti-Catholic.⁸ It is certainly both. It is also blasphemous and scatological, sometimes simultaneously:

Is God a being?

If he is one, he is shit.

[Artaud 1976: 561]

A private performance was arranged on February 23. The day after, Artaud wrote to Thévenin, "I have the impression that people were disappointed in my radio broadcast ... this is why I am through with Radio..."¹¹ He died in March.

Pour en finir might seem an artistic dead end which, as Sheer says, "continues to resist aesthetic recuperation",¹² but it is also the radio equivalent of *Finnegan's Wake*, stream of consciousness taken as far as it can go. Artaud's consciousness is more Jung than Freud and when words are no longer good enough he crosses into glossolalia – speaking in tongues – meaningless babble in literary terms but meaningful as pure sound.

o reche modo

to edire

di za

tau dari

do padera coco

[Artaud 1976: 560]

Artaud's radio piece has its progeny, through Blin to Beckett and thence to those whom Beckett influenced. The immediate effect, however, was that French radio

⁸ The play was not broadcast until March 5 1972 on the minority France-Culture channel. (Helga Finter, "From Antonin Artaud and the impossible theatre: the legacy of the theatre of cruelty", in Sheer 2004: 48-49)

abandoned experimental drama in favour of experimental music. Within weeks of Artaud's death, Pierre Schaeffer created *musique concrète* in the studios of RTF with his three-minute sequence of manipulated recordings *Études aux chemins de fer*.^h

13.4 The radio experiments of Samuel Beckett

Samuel Beckett was living in Paris at the time of the Artaud scandal. He would undoubtedly have heard rumours about the play's contents but he was not invited to the private performance because he was unknown even in avant-garde circles. In 1947-8 he was the author of sub-Joycean novels that were either unpublished or unsold, earning a living by giving private English lessons,¹³ and working on a sort of proto-drama, *Eleuthéria*, which has never been published but from which derives most of his later stage work. Beckett moved into the circle of Artaud in the summer of 1950 when he began his long association with Roger Blin. For Blin, Beckett was "one of the two most important people in my life. He and Artaud divided my sentiments between them."¹⁴

On stage, Beckett embodies the human condition in characters who increasingly cannot move. In his first radio play, conversely, his characters are constantly on the move as if Beckett is testing out a direct dramatic alternative to his stage world. His subsequent radio work, however, from *Embers* to *Cascando*, develops the curmudgeonly stream of consciousness of the novels into a subconscious dramatic vocabulary which in turn fosters the imagery of the late stage works in which mute listeners are baited by disembodied voices, which may or may not be their own, most notably perhaps in *That Time* (1975).

Uniquely among major dramatists there is a sense that Beckett turned to radio because he could achieve on radio what he could not yet achieve on stage.ⁱ John Pilling says, "The radio plays suggest that Beckett had realised that live theatre could not encompass successfully his developing themes of the relationship between creativity and identity. The irresistible presence and tangibility of the actor constantly tend to make speculations about identity seem absurd."¹⁵

^h See Weiss 1995

ⁱ See Chapter 16 for discussion of the sound of Beckett's radio plays.

Maddy Rooney moves through the radiophonic world of *All That Fall* on a kind of parochial odyssey, but Henry's world in *Embers* (1959) is almost entirely inside his head. We are never sure if Ada and Addie are really his wife and daughter or, like Holloway and Bolton, characters in one of the stories Henry is perpetually struggling to articulate. We initially take on trust the reality of the shingled strand that Henry claims to be walking and sitting on but later, when he is able to peremptorily call up the classic radio sound effect of horses' hooves, we start to doubt the authenticity of this world:

HENRY: ... Hooves! [Pause. Louder.] Hooves! [Sound of hooves walking on hard road. They die rapidly away.] Again!

[Hooves as before. Pause.]

ADA: Did you hear them?

HENRY: Not well.

ADA: Galloping?

HENRY. No.

[Beckett 1986: 257]

Pilling sees *Embers* as "the first dramatic product of Beckett's increased experimentation at the end of the 1950s..."¹⁶ and "part of the attempt, still not completed by the time of *Not I*, to bring the audience into the centre of the dramatic experience as a compensation for the increasing interiorisation of the drama."¹⁷ Certainly the radio plays beginning with *Embers* form a self-contained cycle quite separate from *All That Fall* but Pilling probably overreaches in compartmentalising Beckett's work. A writer who only steps into the public consciousness in his late forties surely only has one period, particularly when his first play is what makes him famous. Even without chronological constraints Beckett's literature has coherence, a singlemindedness second only, in English at least, to Jane Austen. Where Austen can be said to have only two narratives, the *Emma*-narrative and the *Persuasion*-narrative, so Beckett has the progressive immobilisation of his stage drama and the increasing incorporeality of the radio drama. Neither is more or less experimental than the other. They are different but complementary. Alvarez is surely correct when he says, "There is a remarkable logic and inevitability about Beckett's progress. The same themes reappear from work to work, each time extended a little further, a little deeper."¹⁸

Hugh Kenner, author of the first full-length study and the first to talk to Beckett in depth about his dramatic work, sees Henry as a analogue of the author: "Henry, in *Embers*, murmuring on the strand, is as much the cheated king of infinite space as the

man who sat in a Paris room writing the thousands upon thousands of words of a three-volume novel: for this space is curved, and returns upon itself.”¹⁹ Kenner recognises Beckett’s clownish humour – he calls him “The Comedian of the Impasse”²⁰ – but he is writing less than ten years into the dramatic career and, of course, without the benefit of the complete *oeuvre*. Thus Kenner sees the Beckettian clown as the Expressionist clown, the make-up masking the tears, whereas hindsight allows us to see that Beckett’s characters are not sad at all but perfectly happy in their proscribed little worlds, picking at old wounds like a couple who have been married far too long. Kenner is right, however, that characterisation mirrors Beckett’s authorial practice. He gives the impression of being blocked, of making repeated stuttering false starts, but is actually quite prolific – three radio experiments in three years, not counting *Rough for Radio I* and *II* and the translation of Robert Pinget’s radio play *La Manivelle*^j – constantly refining his dramatic practice in search of the perfect expression of his vision.

The remaining radio works share a theme not referenced in the stage plays and only hinted at in *Embers*, albeit in one of the more memorable passages, when Henry conjures up his daughter’s manic music master:

MUSIC MASTER: [Violently.] Fa!
 ADDIE: [Tearfully.] What?
 MUSIC MASTER: [Violently.] Eff! Eff!
 ADDIE: [Tearfully.] Where?
 MUSIC MASTER: [Violently.] Qua! [He thumps note.] Fa!
 [Beckett 1986: 258-259]

Whilst the “Qua!” echoes Lucky’s glossolalia “quaquaquaqua” in *Godot*,²¹ the Music Master ushers in Beckett’s new preoccupation with the dichotomy between words and music. On the one hand this references the role of music in Beckett’s artistic and domestic life;^k on the other it is the quintessential dilemma of radio, music-versus-speech. Interestingly, whilst Beckett allows his stage designers no leeway whatsoever, he is wholly unspecific about the music in his radio plays.

The theme begins in *Rough for Radio I*, written in 1961 but not published until 1976. The gloomy He has “suffered” She to come and listen:

^j *The Old Tune* BBC Third Programme August 23 1960.

^k “Beckett has always had a profound interest in music – he is an accomplished pianist and is married to a musician...” [Pilling 1976: 5].

SHE: Is it true the music goes on all the time?
 HE: Yes.
 SHE: Without cease?
 HE: Without cease.
 SHE: It's unthinkable! [Pause.] And the words too? All the time too?
 HE: All the time.
 [Beckett 1986: 267]

She experiments with the two knobs of He's unspecified radio but does not share He's need for the two strands. He is left alone with Music and Voice until they are driven to silence by the insistent ringing of a telephone. The theme continues in *Words and Music*,¹ where the abstractions are squabbling schoolboys, Joe and Bob respectively, brought to heel by Croak and his club.

CROAK: Joe.
 WORDS: [Humble.] My Lord.
 CROAK: Bob.
 MUSIC: Humble muted adsum.
 CROAK: My comforts! Be friends!
 [Beckett 1986: 287]

Beckett's radiophonic experiment culminates in *Cascando*,^m where Croak has become the Opener, who "opens" the Voice and then "opens" the Music, and sometimes "opens" both together. What the Opener "opens", the Opener can of course close. Unlike He in *Rough for Radio*, the Opener is in complete control.

What do I open?
 They say, He opens nothing, he has nothing to open, it's in his head.
 They don't see me, they don't see what I do, they don't see what I have, and
 they say, He opens nothing, he has nothing to open, it's in his head.
 I don't protest any more, I don't say any more,
 There is nothing in my head.
 I don't answer any more.
 I open and close.
 [Beckett 1986: 300]

Henry from *Embers* has now become Voice, still struggling to compose his story, only now his character is another evocative English placename – not Holloway or Bolton but Woburn – and now the Voice has music to comfort him. In the end, the three elements come together:

OPENER: [With VOICE and MUSIC, fervently.] Good!
 VOICE: [Together.] –this time...it's the right one...finish...no more stories...

¹ BBC Third Programme, November 13 1962

^m ORTF October 12 1963, BBC Third Programme October 6 1964.

MUSIC: sleep...we're there...nearly...just a few more...don't let
Go...Woburn...he clings on...come on...come on--- [Beckett 1986: 304]

Pilling calls *Cascando* “one of Beckett’s masterpieces”²² and Levy writes: “With *Cascando*, Beckett achieves maximal density and an almost absolute exhaustion of radiophonic elements, creating a perfect balance between economy of means and richness of expression.”²³

13.5 Postwar German *Hörspiele*

The rise of the Nazis ended avant-gardism on German radio and it was not until 1947 that the *hörspiel* tradition was reinvented with Borchert’s *Draussen vor der Tür*. Early *hörspiele* had tended to be cinematic, actuality-based, using the signatures of modern technology such as telephones and radio itself, albeit subverted on occasion by Flesch and his protégés.ⁿ *Hörspiele* of what might be called the second period, on the other hand, were highly literary, modernist, reflecting a nation and indeed a world fractured in the aftermath of war. Günter Eich’s *Träume* (*Dreams*, 1951), for example, consists ostensibly of five dreams dreamt by people on five continents on various nights between 1947 and 1950. The dreams are not quite nightmares but certainly bad dreams. In the European dream generations have spent their lives enclosed on an endless deportation train going nowhere; in the Australian dream an unspecified brutish monster drives a family from their home and township. In fact, compared to Borchert’s waking nightmare,^o Eich’s dreams are disappointing. What makes the play significant and typical of second period *hörspiele* are the two framing devices which both link and, in the Brechtian sense, alienate; the slabs of blank verse that separate the dreams and the diffident, sometimes dismissive introductions to the dreamers:

As we know, there can be many different kinds of Zero Hour: on April 27, 1950, one of these was the subject of a dream seen by Lewis Stone, an auto mechanic in Freetown, Queensland, Australia. For reassurance, it should be noted that Stone presently enjoys the best of health and has long since forgotten this dream. [Frost and Herzfeld-Sander 1991: 81]

ⁿ See Chapter 5.

^o See Chapter 10.

On the face of it *Dreams*, like *Under Milk Wood*, requires two narrative voices, in this instance one reflective and portentous, the other gossipy, confiding. But neither is identified as a narrator; the poetry is simply there on the page and the paragraph quoted above is printed as a stage direction. Are they then the same voice, the same gender? Are they indeed dispensable? Eich's later plays – that is to say those available in English such as *Don't Go to Al-Kuwaid!* (1950)^p and *The Rolling Sea at Setúbal* (1957)^q – tend to be philosophical fables in similar vein to Betti's *The Queen and the Rebels* – whereas the freedom of interpretation permitted the producer in *Dreams* became a signature of second period *hörspiele*. Jürgen Becker took this freedom to the ultimate extreme in *Häuser* (*Houses*, 1969) in which the speakers are neither identified nor even enumerated.

---Burgmann doesn't live here anymore?
 ---No, he doesn't live here now.
 ---Where does he live now?
 ---Nobody really knows.

[Frost and Herzfeld-Sander 1991: 227-228]

Peter Handke plays the same game with identity or the lack of it but gives his *Hörspiel 1* (1968) a visceral dramatic backbone by making it about the interrogation of what appears to be a suspect – or perhaps two. His *dramatis personae* lists a Questioner, a Questioned, an Interrogated and five Interrogators, A to E. Beyond that, he offers no characterisation beyond what producers and performers opt to bring to the text. Handke – this being the period of the “Speak-Ins” that made his theatrical reputation^r – is primarily interested in upending the equilibrium of his audience. Thus the Questioner begins by asking the Questioned about his (or her) questioning but there is no reason to suppose that this was (or is) the same quizzing that the Interrogators subject the Interrogated to. At one stage the Questioner questions the Interrogators; the Questioner and the Questioned begin asking one another simultaneous questions; by the end they are communicating in non-verbal sounds. And Handke adds a second layer of uncertainty by inserting archetypal radiophonic sound effects (wind, doorbells, kettles.

^p In Frost and Herzfeld-Sander (1991) but not part of Pacifica's *SoundPlay* series 1991-1992 (see Chapter 15).

^q In *Journeys*, translated by Michael Hamburger (1968).

^r Known in English as *Offending the Audience* and *Self-Accusation*, both 1966.

etc.) which he specifies are to be “used musically rather than realistically – to surprise, not to explain.”²⁴

The homogenisation of the individual in a godless, capricious and downright antagonistic universe is a trope of 20th century Germanic literature from Kafka to Grass. The Austrian poet Ingeborg Bachmann achieved a greater dramatic impact than other second period *hörspeil* writers because she placed emotional engagement at the heart of this arbitrary universe. Her award-winning *The Good God of Manhattan* (1958)⁵ has many of the signatures of the form – a quasi-judicial framing device, a chorus of “genderless, monotonous”²⁵ voices exhorting conformity – but the narrative drive comes from the affair of American Jennifer and European Jan, conducted in utterly naturalistic bars and sleazy hotel rooms “where they fry fish in the kitchenette, wash their socks in the bathroom sink and hang them over the shower bar.”²⁶ Bachmann subverts the expectations of her era – especially so in the context of idealised American *mores* – by having the woman, Jennifer, drive the affair. Jan is just a visitor, availing himself of the local attractions, whereas Jennifer wants passion in her life and, with that passion, to break free of the crushing expectations of conformist society. It is Jennifer who picks up Jan, with a line brimful of resonance – “Are you looking for the exit?”²⁷ And it is Jennifer that society – personified by the Good God – destroys for her proto-feminist presumption. Bachmann’s Manhattan is both “the largest city of the major Western superpower”²⁸ and the expression of atomic age – Manhattan as in the Manhattan Project. Jennifer and non-conformists like her are, to the Good God:

...like the rare elements that are found here and there, whose powerful radiation destroys everything and calls the world into question. Even the memories that remain of them contaminate the places they have touched.

[Frost and Herzfeld-Sander 1991: 185]

Thus Jennifer is blown up in her hotel room by bombs planted by the Good God’s squirrel captains, Billy and Frankie. Jan survives because he does not love; he uses and then, quite rightly, abandons.

Second period *hörspiele* were radical in every sense and greatly influenced radio drama across continental Europe – Jeroen Stout’s *Lee de Forest – Spirit of the Pioneer*.

⁵ Winner of the prestigious Radio Drama for the War-blind award instituted in 1951. For details see <http://www.kriegsblindenbund.de/publikationen/Hoerspiel.htm>.

winner of the 2006 Prix Italia, sits comfortably in the tradition – but in Germany itself such plays were considered staid by the mid 1960s. Mark Cory identifies Paul Pörtner's *Schallspielstudie I*,¹ produced by the Bavarian Broadcasting Network in 1965, as the first of the New *Hörspiel*:

The piece lasts in its entirety only about eleven minutes, and is comprised of four parts, actually of three variations on a basic scene. This scene features a combination of verbal and nonverbal elements knit loosely into a fairly conventional framework of speech and sound effects. The four nonverbal elements used are laughter, footsteps, the shattering of glass by a kicked ball, and dripping water. A woman, alone in her room, hears these noises and reacts to them. She counts the drops of water, trying to sleep; she listens to the approaching steps, wondering whose they are and whether they mean a visit; she is frightened by a breaking window and wonders anxiously about its cause. Her reactions grow gradually more hysterical until she can react only through laughter.
[Cory 1974: 27-28]

This seems no more avant-garde than, for example, *Words and Music* but where Beckett enshrines the word in the silent void Pörtner manipulates the sounds to undermine and negate the word. “For example, the counting words no longer issue from the expected ‘verbal’ vehicle, the woman’s voice, but have moved closer to the nonverbal realm through the acquisition of the strong rhythm of dripping water.”²⁹ Pörtner and Beckett nevertheless derive their radio experiments from the same source, Schaeffer and Tardieu’s *Club d’Essai* experiments for ORTF in Paris.³⁰ The New *Hörspiele* was essentially a fusion of *musique concrète* and concrete poetry. Language became the subject of the drama rather than simply the means, processed sound (Beckettian *bruitage*) a contributor rather than mere background. These are the plays that Huwiler describes and analyses:

They work with different musical styles like pop, opera, jingles, chorals and hip hop, and use recitals, dialogues, monologues, citations, reports and commentary as rhetorical features, while using electro-acoustical manipulation and stereophony as technical ones. By putting these elements together, they allow a story to unfold indirectly instead of telling it in a baldly linguistic manner.
[Huwiler 2005: 48]

Sometimes technique predominates – *O-Ton*, ‘original sound’ is a popular quasi-dramatic radiophonic form in Germany – whilst other New *Hörspiele* achieve powerful

¹ “Sound-play-study”

dramatic effect. Pinfold cites Gert Hofmann's *Kinderreime* (NDR, 1971), "which evoked the 1966 Aberfan tragedy in a montage of fairy tales, nursery rhymes and narrative".³¹

Today, literary and radiophonic *hörspiele* flourish side-by-side with more conventional adaptations, dramatisations and children's drama on German public radio.^u French public radio favours literary art drama and acoustic art is supported throughout the public broadcasting world^v - except in the country with the world's first public broadcasting system and the world's first dedicated culture channel. The 21st century BBC offers no airtime for the contemporary equivalent of *Kaleidoscope*; it has, however, provided the platform for the world's only experiments in interactive radio drama, Nick Fisher's *The Wheel of Fortune* and Mike Walker's *The Dark House*.

13.6 Experiments in interactivity

Der Flug der Lindberghs was an early experiment in interactivity but it was not the first. The legal debacle surrounding the commercialisation of *The White Château* in 1925^w did not deter the BBC from further exercises in audience involvement. Scannell and Cardiff have found a 'psycho-puzzle' called *Which?* – "a mystery play competition, in which listeners heard the first three parts of a serial drama and were asked to supply the *dénouement*", broadcast by the BBC in January 1926,³² which was followed in June by R E Jeffrey's *Wolf! Wolf!*³³

The mystery genre is suited to such exercises and similar promotions accompanied *Paul Temple* throughout its thirty-year run. It is highly unlikely that listeners' submissions ever influenced the substantive narrative. Nick Fisher's *The Wheel of Fortune* (September 2001), on the other hand, allowed each listener to construct their own version of a pre-determined narrative.

^u See Chapter 15.

^v See for example, the *Earclips* section of ABC Australia's archived *Listening Room* site: http://www.abc.net.au/classic/listening_room/.

^w See Chapter 3.

Fisher's concept was a three-handed play about chance. He outlined three narrative lines, each from the perspective of one of the characters, then broke these down into interchangeable scenes. In effect, instead of a straight-line, beginning-to-end narrative, Fisher created a mosaic of scenes, whereby a listener could opt to turn left or right or continue going forward. Each scene lasted between 50 and 70 seconds, ending with the sound cue of a ball clattering round a roulette wheel, a question with three answers and a command to "SWITCH NOW!" For example, physicist Leonard is pondering the tensions between the visible and invisible worlds. He asks, "What controls both?" and gets three possible answers: "God", "Random access" and "Roulette". SWITCH NOW! Each option took the over-arching story forward another increment in a different way but not so at odds with the other choices that it would prevent the listener opting to switch back to that narrative at a later juncture.

There were 22 switch points in the 30-minute play and, it was claimed, 94 billion possible permutations. To achieve parallel scenes of identical length required digital editing technology but the analogue broadcast technology of 2001 was not capable of handling transmission. The original idea was to broadcast the three play-strands simultaneously on three channels, Radio 3 and Radio 4 and one other, with the listener literally 'switching'. Neither Radio 1, Radio 2 or Radio 5 were willing to lose airtime, resulting in an uncomfortable compromise whereby the hacker's story went out on R3, the gambler's story on R4, and the following night the gambler's story went out on R3, the professor's story on R4.³⁴ Only online could the BBC offer true interactivity and then only for one month following the broadcast.

Where *The Wheel of Fortune* allowed the listener to construct a version of the narrative, *The Dark House*^x offered listeners the chance to influence what was broadcast and subsequently delve deeper online. Where Fisher had celebrated the idea of an audience playing with his narratives, the *Dark House* team sought enhanced emotional engagement with their characters.³⁵ Again, Mike Walker's ghost story hinges on three main characters who each find themselves in a haunted house and who are only aware of one another in an odd, disengaged way. This, it transpires, is because they exist on

^x Radio 4 September 23 2003, produced by Izzy Mant and Nick Ryan.

different time planes. Each character believes the others are ghosts when in fact – in the listeners' reality – they all are.

During the broadcast listeners were invited to text in to Broadcasting House – again, on a given signal – and vote for which character they would like to hear more of. According to the BBC website 2706 text votes were received on the night, each character receiving a third of the vote.^y Mike Walker himself saw no purpose in the vote: “I don’t believe it has any relevance at all because you’re only hearing it once so it doesn’t matter how it changes. It only exists as an interactive drama on the web where you can change.”³⁶ Online, the three strands the producers had on their mixing desk on the night of the broadcast were available to the ‘listener’ to explore at will. Only at that point did the experience become significantly interactive.

Neither *The Wheel of Fortune* nor *The Dark House* was popular with the established radio drama audience. Nevertheless both plays give a glimpse of what might be possible in an age of convergence, where a sound stream is transmitted alongside other digital content (music, graphics, links) which the listener can use to enhance the dramatic experience. It would be particularly effective, of course, in the genre in which interactivity began, the mystery or ‘psycho-puzzle’.

13.7 Conclusions

Avant-garde experiments were natural in the early years of broadcasting but were squeezed out in the second decade as other imperatives – populist, commercial and political – prevailed. The postwar rebuilding of broadcasting systems recovered from the Nazis led to modernist radio literature in Germany and radiophonic experiments in France. In the 1960s French experiments in *musique concrète* influenced the pioneers of a new, anti-literary German *hörspiel*. British radio drama, however, remained a literary form and although the later radio plays of Samuel Beckett develop some of the ideas of Artaud and prefigure those of the New *Hörspiel*, they remain fundamentally literary.

^y <http://www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/1000000.stm>

Avant-garde drama in general atrophied around the time of Peter Handke's *Offending the Audience* in 1966. In purely acoustic forms it is impossible to conceive of anything more avant-garde than John Cage's 4' 33" of total silence. Currently the challenge in radio drama is more technological than artistic, exploring the ways in which the listener engages with the broadcast performance.

References

- ¹ John Willett, Introduction to Brecht 1997: xi
- ² "Notes to *Der Flug der Lindberghs*" in Brecht 1964: 32
- ³ "The German Drama: pre-Hitler" in Brecht 1964: 80
- ⁴ From *Versuche I* (1930), quoted in Brecht 1997: 207
- ⁵ Artaud 1976: xix
- ⁶ Artaud 1976: xix
- ⁷ Artaud 1976: 6
- ⁸ Letter to Wladimir Porché, February 4 1948; Artaud 1976: 578
- ⁹ Scheer 2004: 89
- ¹⁰ Schumacher 1989: 188
- ¹¹ Artaud 1976: 584
- ¹² Scheer 2004: 6
- ¹³ Bair 1978: 373
- ¹⁴ Bair 1978: 405
- ¹⁵ Pilling 1976: 94
- ¹⁶ Pilling 1976: 98
- ¹⁷ Pilling 1976: 99
- ¹⁸ Alvarez 1974: 37
- ¹⁹ Kenner 1962: 25
- ²⁰ Kenner 1962: 25
- ²¹ Beckett 1986: 42
- ²² Pilling 1976: 103
- ²³ Levy 1990: 77
- ²⁴ Frost and Herzfeld-Sanders 1991: 197
- ²⁵ Frost and Herzfeld-Sanders 1991: 148
- ²⁶ Lennox 2006: 254
- ²⁷ Frost and Herzfeld-Sander 1991: 152
- ²⁸ Lennox 2006: 245
- ²⁹ Cory 1974: 33
- ³⁰ Kahn and Whitehead 1994: 353
- ³¹ Pinfold 1999: 476
- ³² Scannell & Cardiff 1991: 310-311
- ³³ *The Times*, BROADCASTING: A competition for listeners, June 1 1926
- ³⁴ Sean Dodson, *Radio by Numbers*, MediaGuardian.co.uk, Monday April 16 2001
- ³⁵ Roger Wood, *Betting on the future*, UK Writer, Summer 2005 pg 17
- ³⁶ Roger Wood, *Betting on the future*, UK Writer, Summer 2005 pg 18

Chapter 14: Contemporary British radio drama

14.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the whole drama output of BBC Radio 3 and Radio 4 for the calendar year 2006. An initial overview compares the amount and forms of radio drama with the years immediately preceding and highlights any anomalies. The forms are then considered, again with a view to establishing the key characteristics of contemporary British radio drama, and what they suggest in terms of the corporate view of the radio drama audience.

The methodology of this chapter is quantitative, with the nature of the broadcast product prioritised over the quality of the individual plays. In order to make the parameters as objective as possible, the BBC's descriptors of the plays – the three- or four-line synopses in the *Radio Times* – have been relied upon even where a critical but inevitably subjective assessment might suggest something different.^a

From January 2004 to December 2006 data was collected from the *Radio Times* on a weekly basis and stored in simple databases. Inevitably, too much information was recorded, particularly in the first two years. The names of lead actors, for example, became irrelevant to this study. When the data was reviewed in January and February 2007 it was evident that the detail of output from 2004 and 2005 was not required, it being very much the same as 2006. In the end a simple list divided by strand seemed the most effective means of presenting the information. Analysis of Appendix 8 then informed a discussion with Alison Hindell, the current Head of BBC Radio Drama,^b at Bush House, London, on March 14 2007.

^a Although, as stated in Chapter 1, classification has been standardised.

^b Appointed March 17 2005.

14.2 Overview of BBC radio drama 2006

Excluding *The Archers*, a programme so unique in terms of contemporary radio drama that it demands specific in-depth study, and BBC Radio's digital-only channels, Radio 4 and Radio 3 broadcast a fraction over 677 hours of drama during the calendar year 2006. Add to this BBC 7's output of archive drama series and serials, *Silver Street* on the Asian Network and the prestige drama product of the World Service,^c and the BBC inarguably transmits more radio drama today than it has ever done before, and much more than any other broadcaster in the world. Appendix 8 breaks down the drama output of Radio 4 and Radio 3 by strand. This can be summarised as follows:

Strand	Hours	% of output
<i>Saturday Play</i>	61.5	9.1
<i>Classic Serial</i>	106	15.6
<i>Drama on 3</i>	79.2	11.7
<i>Woman's Hour Serial</i>	127.5	18.8
<i>Afternoon Play</i>	198	29.25
Serials and Series	39	5.76
Specials	1.5	0.22
<i>The Wire</i>	13.4	1.97
<i>Friday Play</i>	51	7.5

Appendix 8 also identifies repeat broadcasts.^d The *Classic Serial* and *Woman's Hour Serial* are divided exactly, with the former usually new on Sunday afternoon and repeated the following Saturday evening,^e and the new episode of the latter broadcast in *Woman's Hour* itself and repeated the same evening. Other strands include repeats in lesser but nevertheless significant proportions. Overall, 36.3% of 2006's drama output consisted of repeats.

Strand	New	Repeat	% Repeat
<i>Saturday Play</i>	49.5	12	19.5
<i>Classic Serial</i>	53	53	50
<i>Drama on 3</i>	55.95	23.25	29.3
<i>Woman's Hour Serial</i>	63.75	63.75	50

^c See Chapter 15.

^d Indicated in the *Radio Times*.

^e But see footnote in Appendix.

<i>Afternoon Play</i>	137.25	60.75	30.68
Serials and Series	30.5	8.5	21.8
Specials	1.5	0	0
<i>The Wire</i>	7.9	5.5	41
<i>Friday Play</i>	32	19	37.25

Appendix 8 then identifies dramatisations and adaptations. Everything not specifically categorised is an original radio play. On that basis over half of the year's output consisted of plays written directly for radio. Again, proportions varied from slot to slot. The *Classic Serial* is self-evidently all dramatisation and *Drama on 3* in the main continues the Third Programme tradition of adapted stage plays whereas *The Wire*, limited though it is in airtime, maintains the Third's commitment to experiment and is thus entirely original. On Radio 4, as the table below demonstrates, the *Afternoon Play* and *Friday Play* strands are overwhelmingly made up of original single plays.

Strand	Dramatisation	Adaptation	Original
<i>Saturday Play</i>	14	25.5	22
<i>Classic Serial</i>	106	0	0
<i>Drama on 3</i>	10	40.3	28.9
<i>Woman's Hour Serial</i>	57.5	2.5	67.5
<i>Afternoon Play</i>	23.25	3.75	171
Serials and Series	30	5	4
Specials	0	0.5	1
<i>The Wire</i>	0	0	13.4
<i>Friday Play</i>	4	2	45
<i>% of total output</i>	36.15	11.6	52.25

The figures have remained broadly the same for each of the three years in which this study was undertaken – inevitably so, given that there is drama on the frontline channels every day of the week. The slight variations in the tables below are the result of more weekends in some calendar years and more five-act stage plays selected for *Drama on 3*. The output in 2005 was significantly lower because there were only nine plays in *The Wire* slot due to R3's coverage of the Proms, a situation offset in 2006 by running repeats early on Saturday evening during the Prom season. The only other significant anomaly is the 93% increase in adaptations in 2006 and the consequent loss of original drama.

	2004	2005	2006
Output	660.25	641.5	677.1
% Repeats	32.67	34.75	37.25
% Dramatisation	40	37	36.15
% Adaptation	6.75	6	11.6
% Original	53.25	57	52.25

The extra adaptations fall entirely into the *Saturday Play* slot; first a series of 90-minute adaptations of notable plays from fifty years of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court theatre – Osborne’s seminal *Look Back in Anger* (1956), *Roots* (1959), *The Sea* (1973), *Top Girls* (1982), *The Rat in the Skull* (1984) and *Home* (1970) – and secondly a series of five further 90-minute adaptations from a similar period grouped together as *Betrayal*, although the connection between Sir Thomas More and Cold War spies is to say the least tenuous. *Death of a Salesman* marked the centenary of Arthur Miller’s birth and Stoppard’s *The Real Thing* (1982) marked the radio debut of director Sir Trevor Nunn. The adaptation in June of Simon Gray’s 1981 teaching comedy, *Quartermaine’s Terms*, was followed in December by an adaptation of his forthcoming stage play *Little Nell* about Dickens’ affair with the actress Ellen Ternan. Whilst all the stage plays adapted for *Saturday Play* in 2006 merited broadcasting and provided quality dramatic entertainment, the loss of airtime for original writing has to be a concern, given the limited number of 60-minute slots and the virtual extinction of 90-minute radio play.

The increase in adaptations was the result of a policy decision by the Controller of Radio 4, Mark Damazer, appointed in September 2004, who justifiably saw plays by well-known playwrights as a means of widening the audience for radio drama.¹ However what Damazer seems to have originally hoped for was new radio originals by well-known stage dramatists. In February 2005 he told *Radio Times*:²

If we look at drama, I think it is of remarkably high quality. But some of what I would call the ‘golden age’ of play writing of the last 40 or 50 years – by the likes of Michael Frayn, Tom Stoppard, Caryl Churchill, David Hare and Alan Ayckbourn – very rarely appears on Radio 4. I hope to persuade them that if they can do fresh pieces for us the audiences would be enthralled.

Although “fresh pieces” were not achieved, Alison Hindell confirmed that 8-10 adapted stage plays would continue to occupy prime slots in 2007.³

14.3 Dramatisations and series

Whilst the *Classic Serial* strand by definition confines itself to reasonably well-known generalist fiction, the 2006 serials included two less familiar semi-autobiographical accounts of childhood, Rebecca West’s *The Fountain Overflows* (1956) – also, at six hours, the longest dramatisation of the year – and *The Cairo Trilogy* (1956-7) by Naguib Mahfouz, winner of the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature. The most striking *Classic Serial* of the year was, however, Nella Larsen’s study of race and gender in 1920s America, *Passing*. *Drama on 3* also included literary dramatisations, although these were shorter works (with the obvious exception of the epic *Gilgamesh*) and thematically less suited to the Sunday afternoon slot. The *Woman’s Hour Serial* was a third outlet for classic dramatisation, notably *Madame Bovary* and the little-known Dickens/Collins/Gaskell collaboration *A House to Let*. Other dramatisations in the slot were strikingly contemporary, including two books published in 2003 (*Our Father...* and *The Flower Room*) and three from 2004 (*The Family Tree*, *Maps for Lost Lovers* and the multi-award-winning *Small Island*).^f Moreover the Pascoe and Cadwalladr books were first novels, making the *Woman’s Hour Serial* an important showcase for new writers. *Zero*, the *Friday Play* on February 24, was another dramatised first novel, but the subject matter – the consequences of rape and genocide in the Balkan conflict of the 1990s – clearly warranted a post-watershed slot. Otherwise, the *Friday Play* included only two dramatisations in 2006, Lucarelli’s 1997 “blind” thriller and Von Harbou’s 1926 dystopia. Dramatisations for the *Afternoon Play* tended to be of short stories by 19th century masters, with the notable exception of the weeklong dramatisation of Delderfield’s *To Serve Them All My Days*, which might perhaps have sat more comfortably elsewhere – as a stand-alone serial, for example. The most striking aspect of the *Afternoon Play* dramatisations, however, was surely the

^f Ironically, the most recent novel dramatised in the slot was written in 1942. Irène Némirovsky’s *Suite Française* (*Dolce*, wc. August 14) was not published in France until 2004, the English translation by Sandra Smith in 2006.

five dramatised poems, ranging from Simon Armitage's new translation from the Middle English of *Gawain and the Green Knight* to Carol Ann Duffy's setting of her own prize-winning collection, *Rapture*.

Crime dominated non-classic dramatisations across the generalist strands (that is to say, the *Saturday*, *Afternoon* and *Friday* plays). Whilst contemporary crime fiction certainly featured – the repeated *Rebus* in August, for example – the majority of crime dramatisations were either Victorian (Zangwill's locked-room conundrum *The Big Bow Mystery*^g), vintage (*Mission to Marseilles*^h), or "Golden Age" (Michael Bakewell's three *Poirot* dramatisationsⁱ) and overwhelmingly favoured the amateur sleuth or private eye over the police procedural. This was particularly the case in series and serials with *Poirot*, *Falco*, *Raisin* and *Paris* dramatisations as well as a *Paul Temple* revival from 1947. Indeed, such is BBC Radio's apparent appetite for period detective drama that the *Afternoon Play* included series of originals by contemporary writers, David Ashton's Victorian Inspector *McLevy* in April and December and Guy Meredith's pastiche *Daunt and Dervish* in June.

The *Afternoon Play* strand showed a clear drift towards 'series' in 2006. Over recent years continuing characters have featured in series of adventures – *McLevy* began with a single play in July 1999, *Daunt and Dervish* with a weeklong series in November 2003, and *Rumpole* has been on radio since 1980 – but the strand also hosted three thematic series in 2006, *Connecting*, *The Memory Experience* and *Stages of Sound*.

Connecting was produced in partnership with the Open University and considered "the real and dramatic impact of communication and technology on our lives, and those of people near us and far away."⁴ The series officially began with Paul Farley's *Friday Play*, *The World in My Ear*, on May 5 although this was actually a fantasy about the end of analogue broadcasting, not linked in any way with the three *Afternoon Plays* on consecutive days the following week. These linked tangentially: in Katie Hims' *Call Waiting* (May 9), Carol received a text message saying simply "Help me" from her husband Phil, who was setting up communication systems in Uzbekistan; in Mike Walker's *Last Call* (May 10), the PR Director of Phil's company helped Carol

^g *Afternoon Play*, March 20.

^h *Saturday Play*, June 3.

ⁱ *Saturday Play*, January 7, serial commencing March 3, and *Afternoon Play*, December 7 and 8.

investigate his disappearance but Sara's main project was a media centre in Mozambique, the subject of Sarah Woods' *Network Failure* (May 11).

The Memory Experience was a pan-BBC project – radio, TV and website – “to explore the fascinating world of memory”⁵ in which radio drama in 2006 was a minor player^j with a repeated *Friday Play* (*Last Loves*, July 28), a repeated two-part thriller (*The Recall Man*, *Afternoon Play* August 14 and 21), a third afternoon repeat (*The Doll's Tea Set*, August 7) and two new 45-minute originals, *In Search of Oldton* and *The August Birthdays* (July 24 and 31 respectively), no different in essential theme than literally dozens of other *Afternoon Plays*, “revisiting the past” being probably the key signature of the strand. *Stages of Sound*, on the other hand, was a joint initiative of the Arts Council and BBC to encourage new regional writers from Black and Asian communities to write for theatre and radio. The three regional winners – Samantha Ellis from London and the South East, Vincent Cleghorne from the North West and Edson Burton from the South West – were then commissioned to write for the *Afternoon Play* slot.^k

Alison Hindell considered that new writing initiatives organised in partnership with producers of other dramatic forms were a key to revitalising radio drama.

If that scheme itself [*Stages of Sound*] doesn't run we'll certainly invent some other collaboration with a theatre. We are just stepping tentatively into a relationship with an organisation that encourages screenwriters because the current commissioner of radio drama is very keen on film. There is an argument, which I happen to subscribe to, that good radio drama is more akin to cinematic writing than theatrical writing and that therefore perhaps we should be talking to people who are writing in that medium already and giving them the chance to cross over.⁶

The trend towards series and serials within the *Afternoon Play* seems likely to continue. In 2007, Alison Hindell said, “they will proportionally in the *Afternoon Play* replace about a third of the original strands.”

^j In January 2007, however, plays written specifically for *The Memory Experience* season were broadcast: *Something Wrong About the Mouth* by David Edgar (*Saturday Play*, January 20) and the *Woman's Hour Serial* for the week commencing January 22, five plays by Michael Butt and Rachel Joyce derived from public contributions to the online Memory Survey.

^k Respectively, *Sugar and Snow* (August 9), *Silver Grey* (August 16) and *The Armour of Immanuel* (August 23).

The knock-on effect in the remaining number of single plays to be commissioned is of course significant and will mean that the range of voices and indeed styles and subjects in single plays will become more focused. I hope that it would become focused in a positive way. If I had a criticism of the *Afternoon Play* it is that it is too much of *pot pourri* in terms of there not being even a recognisable quality benchmark in the writing and the producing.

Interestingly, she added, “There will be more dramatisations of novels but in terms of the new initiative the majority of the work will be original because it’s cheaper.”

14.4 Afternoon Play

Any diminution in the number of single plays in the *Afternoon Play* strand is critical to the continued wellbeing of radio drama as a whole given that the *Afternoon Play* is not only the biggest user of new original drama but also the strand most likely to accommodate first time radio dramatists. In fact, Alison Hindell revealed: “In the *Afternoon Play* there is a corporate policy – nobody knows who it was written by but it’s in tablets of stone – that 25% of the *Afternoon Plays* should be written by first- or second-time writers.” By definition all this 25% consists of single plays and virtually all are original.

The themes that predominate in *Afternoon Play* are significant indicators of the condition of the British form. Absurdism – in its idiosyncratic BBC form, the “English Everyday Absurd” discussed in Chapter 11 – remains a dominant genre. A typical example would be Robert Shearman’s *Odd* (April 19), which subverts the very essence of radio drama, words and their meaning. A number of other plays derive their drama from the conjunction of apparently incongruous elements or characters yet are not absurd (their concern is not the absurdity of man’s existence) but true. The title of Lee Pressman’s *Harpo Goes to Leningrad* (May 4) epitomises this category. Incongruity does not always end in comedy, however – bringing together a Nazi apologist and a Holocaust survivor (*Todtnauberg*, January 20) has nothing amusing about it yet the incongruity is what fuels the drama. A different slant on incongruity underlies what might be called “Fish out of water” plays, where something external (a lottery win for

Mike Stott's *Lucky Lonny*, June 6) knocks an individual's normality out of balance, almost invariably to comic effect.

History, like the English Everyday Absurd, is a genre that can flourish on radio better than any other medium. On radio there are no distracting costumes, no need for set-piece pageantry, and mannered speech forms are much more acceptable than, say, in cinema film. Within the history genre, three sub-genres are discernable in the 2006 *Afternoon Play*: the straightforward historical, from a time so long ago that no one living can remember it; period nostalgia, set within the last seventy years, a timeframe familiar to listeners who, if they did not live through it themselves certainly knew those who did; and "Lives of Artists", again a particularly radiogenic genre in that there is no need to recreate the art in order to explore the mind of the artist.

A variant of period nostalgia involves revisiting or coming to terms with the protagonist's past. In 2006 this ranged from reuniting with childhood friends (*Once a Friend*, January 17) to returning to the childhood home (*Return to Killroe*, November 13) or simply coming to terms with the loss of a loved one (*Migrant Memory*, May 12, or more typically *Thrift*, August 2). Plays in this category are by no means all downbeat. Indeed, gentle comedy is the prevailing tone, the aim being more reassurance than indulgence. Likewise relationship comedies far outnumber "straight" relationship dramas, the complete opposite of the archetypal relationship drama on television, the *grand guignol* of soap opera.

In the broadest possible terms, it can be said that the archetypal *Afternoon Play* in 2006 was an affirmative relationship comedy in which a mature protagonist revisits, with nostalgia, the reasonably recent past. In any form of drama the protagonist mirrors the envisaged audience. Clearly, then, the audience for the *Afternoon Play* is seen as middleaged to elderly, more likely to be female than male. This is confirmed by a significant number of plays with a medical theme, mirroring television daytime programming, although it is noticeable that radio, unlike television, tends towards mental health (that is to say "invisible" or "interior") themes.

Even so there were a number of plays broadcast in 2006 that demonstrate the continued vigour and relevance of the daily 45-minute radio play. For example, *A Tiny*

Light in the Darkness (March 22), set on the London Tube in the immediate aftermath of the July 2005 bombings, brought a front-page *frisson* to the original radio paradigm. “Danger in the darkness.”^l

14.5 The regional voice

One aspect of radio drama practice in the past that is clearly not well served today is the regional voice. Production continues in the regions – *The Archers* and *Silver Street*, for instance, are both produced in Birmingham – but there is no Manchester or West Country school or style. Inevitably, the longstanding BBC culture of metropolitan centralisation marginalizes the regions but there are also practical considerations over which the BBC has no control. For example:

Scotland has the biggest output of the regions^m At a practical level a vast amount of their output is recorded in London. There are Scottish actors living in Scotland but as soon as they want to do something that’s got a broader scope it’s cheaper for a producer to come here than to ship the whole cast to Scotland.⁸

The biennial Alfred Bradley Bursary, open to first-time radio dramatists living in the North, is certainly an attempt to reinvigorate the regional system that brought John Arden to radio in 1956. The 2005 winner was Anthony Cropper whose *I’ll Tell You About Love* was the *Afternoon Play* on December 12 2005; the 2007 recipient is Mark Shand for *Abigail Adams*; but the most successful discovery to date has undoubtedly been Lee Hall, creator of *Spoonface Steinberg* and *Billy Elliot*, who won the Bradley Bursary in 1994 with *I Luv You Jimmy Spud*. The controversial transfer of much BBC activity to Salford might help to reduce the centralisation of creativity in the long term but in the immediate future regional radio drama’s best hope is Alison Hindell’s professional background and personal commitment to regionalism.

I am passionately pro regional drama. It is one of the reasons the BBC exists in my view. I spent fifteen years of my career in Cardiff and was careful to keep the focus of my work on local writers or stories or at the very least productions

^l Surely the most up-to-the-minute radio drama of 2006, however, was *Baghdad Burning*, the dramatised blog of “Riverbend”, an young Iraqi woman living the aftermath of the 2003 invasion (*Woman’s Hour Serial*, week commencing December 17).

^m *The Number One Ladies Detective Agency*, for example, is made in Scotland.

that could be cast locally, so that there was constant Welsh flavour about the work that I was doing. It used to be absolutely unquestioned that if you work in one of the regions that would be the focus of your work, your *raison d'être*, actually. As the commissioning process has been introduced and a greater competitive element has crept into our work, which is not positive in my view, that *raison d'être* has become less focused on. Several commissioners would say first of all “I want to buy the best ideas that I’m offered and I don’t care where they come from”, and secondly would say “Why shouldn’t a London producer offer a good Welsh idea if they come across it?” – but they certainly don’t feel that they are obligated in any way to keep up a proportion of regional voices. And I think that’s desperately sad, actually. It reduces the whole point of the BBC as a public service organisation, a patron of arts across the UK, which is what it should be.⁹

14.6 Departures from the norm

Appendix 8 put two plays in a “Specials” strand simply because they were not aired in regular slots. *Great Scott* was a bit of Boxing Day fun, part of the Christmas schedule which replaced the normal pattern. *The Road, the House, the Road*, on the other hand, aired on a Thursday evening in July and the normal schedules were disrupted to accommodate it.

The Road, the House, the Road was commissioned to mark Howard Barker’s sixtieth birthday. Barker’s other birthday commission, *Let Me*, was broadcast in *Drama on 3*, which could just as comfortably have included *The Road, the House, the Road*. *Let Me* framed the immigration debate in the context of 5th century Britain and the reaction of Romanised Britons to incoming Saxons, whereas *The Road, the House, the Road* was a philosophical tragedy – in many ways reminiscent of Barker’s *Scenes from an Execution*ⁿ – in which, somewhere in the perennially war-torn Europe of the early Reformation, a wealthy woman demands that a wandering humanist scholar should kill her. That Radio 4 chose to broadcast Barker’s astringent Puritanism to a larger, generalist audience at 8pm on a weekday evening hints that, when the occasion arises, routine programming can still be disrupted and non-mainstream plays by dissenting writers can still be broadcast to a non-elitist listenership. Other leading names of

ⁿ See above, Chapter 12.

Barker's generation are coming up to significant birthdays.⁹ It will be interesting to see if their anniversaries are marked with commissions for new radio originals or the more usual adapted stage plays.

The fortieth anniversary of Giles Cooper's early death was marked with a revival of *Under the Loofah Tree* (*Afternoon Play*, February 7) whereas Gerry Jones, whose 1979 play *Time After Time* was revived in the same slot on March 9, died as recently as February 2005.¹⁰ A centenary revival of *Money With Menaces* from 2004 was repeated on March 2, *In Parenthesis* (*Drama on 3*, November 12^p) was a revival of Cleverdon's classic dramatisation, and *Paul Temple and the Sullivan Mystery* was, as mentioned above, a revival from 1947. The issue of revivals and the use of archive is discussed at length in Chapter 16, nevertheless the increased use of radio drama's own history in 2006 reminded listeners that here was a major art form of the 20th century.

The form's claims to a relevant future were illustrated by *The Unexpected European* (*Friday Play*, September 8), five very short plays from other European broadcasters and one from the BBC on a shared European theme.

Title	Dramatist	Broadcaster
<i>The Unexpected Dane</i>	Kasper Hoff	DR Denmark
<i>The Unexpected Finn</i>	Harri Virtanen	YLE Finland
<i>Rain Dogs</i>	Alexander Adolph	Radio Bremen Germany
<i>Rain in My Suitcase</i>	Rommi Smith	BBC
<i>Donald and I</i>	Fabrice Melquiot	Radio France France Culture
<i>Expecting Rain</i>	Dubravko Mihanovic	HRT Croatia

Whilst *Drama on 3* continues the Third Programme tradition of showcasing stage drama from other countries and other traditions, it is extremely rare for radio writers from other countries to have their work aired in the UK – a frankly bizarre omission, considering the BBC's reputation in the wider world of radio drama. The condition of contemporary radio drama outside Britain is discussed in Chapter 15 but perhaps –

⁹ In 2007, for example, David Hare will turn 60, Tom Stoppard 70, whilst Charles Wood and Arnold Wesker will both reach 75. *The Lost Love of Phoebe Mills* (*Afternoon Play*, November 28) was an 80th birthday commission for Bernard Kops.

^p Also a repeat from 2004.

hopefully, indeed – *The Unexpected European* will be the forerunner of more cross-border co-productions.

14.7 Conclusions

In one sense radio drama has not moved on at all since 1922. The 40- to 45-minute running time which Kolin Hager insisted upon for *The Wolf* remains the most common length for British radio plays in 2006, whilst that other American paradigm, the 15-minute serial, provided the platform for the most up-to-date dramatisations and – in *Baghdad Burning* – the most cutting-edge subject matter.

There was more original drama than adaptation or dramatisation, but the large number of adaptations in *The Saturday Play* suggested that original writing might lose out to the kind of alternative provincial repertory theatre which Val Gielgud favoured for most of his career. Similarly there were more series in slots traditionally reserved for single plays. Thematic series, of course, remain collections of single plays and the portmanteau series in the *Woman's Hour Serial* slot are currently the last bastion of the British one-act radio play. But radio is both the most ubiquitous of mass media and the easiest to switch off; a series of single plays that fails to engage a listener loses that listener for the rest of the series and a listener that loses the habit of radio drama might easily be lost for good.

Although blogs and communication technology were used as subject matter there were no truly experimental radio plays broadcast in 2006. Gregory Whitehead's *The Club* (*Drama on 3*, January 1) was one of his mainstream works but was nevertheless as avant-garde as anything else broadcast in the year. *The Wire* aspires to be quirky and edgy and succeeds more often than not, but it remains essentially a literary form – *hörspiel* of the German postwar reconstruction rather than the New *Hörspiel* of the Sixties and beyond. Perhaps the saddest choice of the year was that of *Drama on 3* in marking Beckett's centenary with stage adaptations rather than the radio originals.

In general, though, there was great variety across all strands and all forms. Radio drama continues to handle subjects like mental illness, ageing and bereavement, which

Chapter 15: The international context

15.1 Introduction

In order to fully assess the current condition of British radio drama it is necessary to consider its standing internationally. A snapshot of peer opinion can be gained from reviewing the winners of international awards such as the Prix Italia and Prix Europa, however plays that win prizes can be very different from the regular output of domestic broadcasting. It is beyond the scope of this study to survey the output of every broadcaster in every country where the form survives but it is surely relevant to compare the material considered in the last chapter with corresponding output in those countries where the form developed alongside the British model – Germany, America, and to a lesser extent France. There is a second tranche of countries where radio drama can be said to have begun in the shadow of British broadcasting, comprising former dominions and Ireland. A selection of these come together in the annual *Worldplay* International Festival of Radio Drama and it is with consideration of the entrants in the 8th *Worldplay*, hosted by CBC Canada in March and April 2006 that this chapter begins.

15.2 The *Worldplay* nations

Each broadcaster participating in *Worldplay* undertakes to air at least three of the entries domestically. The table below gives the order in which the host broadcast the plays.

Worldplay 8		
<i>A Stone's Throw</i>	Jason Sherman	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
<i>Attitude</i>	Stuart Hoar	New Zealand Radio
<i>Fired!</i>	Annabelle Gurwitz	LA Theater Works
<i>To Throw Down God</i>	Mike Walker	BBC World Service
<i>Run Rabbit Run</i>	Alana Valentine	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
<i>St Artaud</i>	Aiden Matthews	Radio Telefis Éireann

Although Mike Walker is one of the most prolific BBC radio dramatists^a and *To Throw Down God* has all the signatures of a Radio 4 play (historical crime drama featuring a real person, in this instance the biographer James Boswell), it will be noted that it represented BBC World Service in *Worldplay*. Only the World Service broadcasts *Worldplay* plays within the BBC, an anomaly which Alison Hindell acknowledges:

I think [*Worldplay*] is culturally very valuable and the World Service certainly regards it as one of the jewels in their schedule. I think it is disappointing that domestic radio doesn't broadcast some of it ... If they're of interest to an international audience why are they not of interest to a domestic audience?¹

The other glaring anomaly, of course, is the presence in *Worldplay* of a radio play from America, where the form is generally held to have withered on the vine following the mass migration to television circa 1950. That this was not entirely the case will be discussed in the next section; however it is certainly a fact that *commercial* American radio drama ended on November 25 1960 when the last remaining CBS soaps, *The Second Mrs Burton*, *The Right to Happiness*, *Young Doctor Malone* and *Ma Perkins*, all aired their final episodes.² The single play had faded from the networks at least a decade earlier.

Canadian radio had begun, uniquely, as in-transit entertainment on the national rail service, broadcasting the adapted stage play *The Rosary* as early as May 1925. By 1927 the Canadian National Railway's Drama Department was broadcasting plays produced by the CNRV players in Vancouver and in 1931 launched the original drama series *Romance of Canada*, written by Merrill Denison and produced in Montreal by Tyrone Guthrie who had been enticed away from the BBC. In 1932 radio was nationalised as the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission (CRBC) and drama series – adaptations, dramatisations and some originals – continued to flourish.^b In 1935, however, the party of government's use of the drama series *Mr Sage* to promote its electoral platform backfired when the opposition won the election.³ The 1936 Canadian Broadcasting Act brought in the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and tighter regulation. CBC was closely modelled on the BBC and although in-house drama production continued in all regional centres this tended to be eclipsed by the broadcasting footprint of the

^a See Chapters 13 and 14.

^b The material in this paragraph has been taken from Howard Fink's article "Radio Drama, English-Language" for the online *Canadian Encyclopedia*, <http://www.bcc.ca/ce>.

American commercial networks. By the time Alice Frick became a script editor in Toronto in 1942 Canadian radio drama had sunk to such a nadir that no plays at all were in production.⁴

The situation was greatly resented by Canadian creative artists. Harry J Boyle, in his introduction to the autobiography of Andrew Allan, writes: “In Canada in the early forties many people, writers especially, were seeking cultural liberation from the British heritage and from the smothering presence of America.”⁵ It was the Scots-born Allan, CBC National Drama Supervisor 1941-1955, who gave Canada its so-called Golden Decade of radio drama, firstly with his signature series *Stage* – “A Report on the State of Canadian drama” – and, from 1947, *CBC Wednesday Night*:

The plan was to clear three hours of prime time on the Trans Canada network for a flexible programme devoted to all appropriate arts: music, literature, poetry, drama and opera. The parent of *CBC Wednesday Night* was obviously the BBC Third Programme, now called Radio 3. The influence of the BBC on CBC practices was still strong. [Frick 1987: 54-55]

Thus *CBC Wednesday Night* featured classic adaptations, dramatisations and some originals. There was also an outlet for dramatisations on the Dominion Network. *Stage*, however, was almost entirely original material. Fink and Jackson subtitle their collection of classic Canadian radio plays “Radio Drama produced by Andrew Allan” for the simple reason that Allan produced virtually all major Canadian radio drama during the Golden Decade, 408 productions under the umbrella of *Stage* alone, all broadcast live, usually from the CBC Concert Studio in Toronto. Like Gielgud, Allan considered that recording dulled drama.^c

The eleven plays in the collection range from a surreal tour of the airwaves in Fletcher Markle’s *Brainstorm Between Opening and Closing Announcements* (1942) to the controversial realism of Lister Sinclair’s *Hilda Morgan* (1949) examining illegitimacy and abortion. The most significant play of the Golden Decade, however, was unquestionably Rueben Ship’s “satirical extravaganza”⁶ *The Investigator* (1954), which sold over 100,000 copies in pirated form and is one of very few plays that can claim to have brought down a demagogue.

^c CBC began using tape in 1951 – see Fink and Jackson 1987: xi.

Ship was a Canadian comedy writer who fell foul of the House Un-American Activities Committee whilst working on NBC's hit radio and television sitcom *The Life of Riley*. Having quoted Thomas Jefferson to Senator McCarthy Ship was deported back to Canada in June 1953. Instead of writing a political polemic or personal apologia, Ship's stroke of genius was to create a satire in the manner of Aristophanes. The unnamed Investigator's plane crashes and he finds himself facing angelic investigation before he can be allowed to enter the afterlife. He soon takes over the investigatory process, exiling subversives to "down there" in accordance with "Section 28a Article 4b paragraph 2 of the Internal Security Regulations." Steadfast to his dictum "There is no one so high as to be immune from investigation", the Investigator does not hesitate to subpoena the Chief himself. Ship recalled the reaction:

The switchboards of CBC stations from Vancouver to Halifax were jammed with telephone calls from listeners, most of them praising the broadcast, a few of them attacking it on either political or religious grounds. Many of the calls were from puzzled listeners who naively believed that they had tuned in to an actual broadcast of one of the controversial Senator's inquisitions... [Ship 1956: 11]

Inevitably, the broadcast had been heard in American border states. Bootleg tapes began to circulate and B&C Records issued an unauthorised commercial recording which Jack Gould reviewed in the New Year's Eve edition of *The New York Times*. It was Gould who promoted the story that President Eisenhower had enlivened Christmas at the Little White House in Georgia by playing the record to great amusement. "Another report," says Ship, "told of a Senator who left an order with a Washington music shop for one copy of *The Investigator* to be delivered everyday, for a whole month, to the house of Senator Joseph McCarthy."⁷

The record became a bestseller. Independent US radio stations played *The Investigator* despite legal threats. The BBC broadcast its own production on the Home Service in August 1955, about the time McCarthy fell from power. Fink and Jackson are probably right in their balanced assessment of the play's contribution to his fall: "One can surmise that it played an underground role in changing American public opinion about the Senator and in expediting his resignation."⁸

CBC TV having launched in 1953, Frick considers *The Investigator* to have been the last play of the Golden Decade. Fink and Jackson elaborate:

A number of radical changes in our cultural institutions which had taken place since 1952 were beginning by the mid-1950s to have negative effects on the position previously enjoyed by the CBC Drama Department. The creation of a new arts-granting agency, the Canada Council, which assumed some of the CBC's benevolent support of the arts; the beginnings of an indigenous Canadian stage network, funded by the Council, which was crowned by the Stratford Festival; the founding of Canada's first national television network, complete with drama series – all these made serious, indeed irreversible inroads into the Radio Drama Department's monopoly on resources and audiences.

[Fink and Jackson 1987: xii]

Allan resigned in 1955 but *Stage* and *Wednesday Night* continued into the 1970s. Even in the 1990s there was a respectable amount of original, ambitious drama on CBC. The scripts in Dave Carley's 1996 *Airplay* anthology include Lorre Jensen's *The Mercy Quilt*, set on a Mohawk reservation in Ontario, and Emil Sher's *Mourning Dove*, commissioned by the *Morningside* current affairs programme, dramatising the real-life 'mercy killing' of a young girl with cerebral palsy by her devoted father. Ten years later, however, CBC's output of radio drama had shrunk to the one-hour *Sunday Showcase* on Radio One, repeated as *Monday Playhouse* on Radio Two. As Appendix 9 suggests, themed series have become standard. In June 2006 the theme was the always popular *Conspiracy Theories*, ending with *It Came from Beyond* by Beverley Cooper – another play about McCarthy and the Hollywood Blacklist.^d The previous series, *Little Italies*, about growing up in Italian communities across Canada, might not have had such general appeal.^e

The Australian experience parallels the Canadian – twenty years of importing American product with few if any opportunities for original Australian radio writing until supply dried up with the US entry into World War II. Rodney Pyrbus points to Douglas Stewart's *Fire in the Snow* (1941) as an early radio original by an Australasian writer (Stewart was a New Zealander).⁹ Whilst ABC's serials and series were American, its single play model was British. In Australia as in Britain the 1940s were the heyday of verse plays for radio by writers such as Tom Inglis Moore, Colin Thiele and Catherine Duncan. Commercial stations continued to produce soaps and serials after the

^d An earlier play in the series (May 14/15 and 22/23) was Sebastian Baczkiewicz's *The Orchid Grower*, about the CIA in the wake of John F Kennedy's assassination, a CBC-BBC co-production which had previously aired as a single ninety-minute piece on the BBC's *Drama on 3* slot (September 11 2005) and was repeated there on June 25 2006.

^e See Appendix 9a.

war and the occasional adapted stage play. As the national public service broadcaster, however, ABC developed a stable of young Australian writers to rival the Angry Young Men of the Third – Colin Free, Patricia Hooker, Mungo McCallum and Francis Webb. On a more prosaic level, surely no writer of radio drama ever equalled the achievement of ABC's Gwen Meredith who wrote all 7094 episodes of the daily soap *Blue Hills* (originally *The Lawsons*) from 1944 to 1976.¹⁰

As in Canada, Australian radio drama had shrunk by 2006 to one production a week, the *Airplay* slot on Sunday afternoon, repeated Friday evening. The time allocation is even more restricted with the plays only running 30 minutes. Often this means splitting a standard hour-length play over two weeks.^f Nevertheless, what Keith Richards claimed in 1991 still probably holds true fifteen years later: "even today, radio drama can attract up to fifty thousand listeners across Australia for one broadcast, which, although small by commercial radio standards is still a higher audience than many stage plays attract in a whole season."¹¹ Fifteen years earlier, Arlene Sykes suggested that smaller audiences might have a beneficial effect on Australian radio drama:

Any programme which must entertain a large number of people is likely to end up as conservative, non-challenging; and now that radio no longer has to carry the responsibility of catering for wide audiences, it can in some programmes at least afford to take risks, to broadcast the way-out, the experimental, the kind of play which will interest a minority group only. [Sykes 1977: xx]

Even in 1977 she was able to qualify this with the observation that "ratings suggest that this minority audience is larger than expected."¹² Certainly ABC has provided a platform for acoustic art in its *Listening Room* series on Classic FM.

Radio drama in New Zealand developed in small steps. In 1928 the stage comedy *Jane* was read on the radio, then in 1931 American serials began. Five years later American serial scripts began to be adapted and reproduced to New Zealand tastes.¹³ Indigenous single plays for radio probably began when W Graham Holder won a prize organised by the National Broadcasting Service in 1936. New Zealand's problem has always been that its best practitioners have emigrated in search of better rewards and wider recognition. Douglas Stewart and Ruth Park both became prolific radio writers in Australia whilst Bruce Stewart established a second successful career in Britain. Those

^f See Appendix 9b.

writers who stayed have tended to develop a career bridging stage, radio and television, no platform being enough to sustain a living on its own. Bruce Mason's *The End of the Golden Weather* (1959) and *The Pohutukawa Tree* (1960) have enjoyed success in all three forms.¹⁴ New Zealand's most famous play written directly for radio was *Jack Winter's Dream* (1959) by the poet James K Baxter in which a dying swagman dreams of his wild youth on the goldfields.

In 2006 National Radio's *Sunday Drama* was the only home for nationally broadcast radio drama in New Zealand yet in June all its offerings were the BBC World Service play of the week.⁸ The trend, however, is for local, community-based radio drama; Radio New Zealand held a Creative Writing and Community Drama Season in 2004-5 and Nelson-based community broadcaster Fresh FM has run an annual radio drama competition since 2003.¹⁵

As English-speaking Empire/Commonwealth nations it is not surprising that Canada, Australia and New Zealand should have developed public service radio networks on the BBC model, nor that they have maintained a commitment to radio drama. The development of Irish radio has inevitably been more complex – literally in the shadow of the BBC yet committed to promoting a distinct national identity and culture. For example the Radio and Television Act 1988 requires the Broadcasting Commission to have regard to:

- (d) the quantity, quality, range and type of programmes in the Irish language and the extent of programmes relating to Irish culture proposed to be provided;
- (e) the extent to which the applicant will create within the proposed sound broadcasting service new opportunities for Irish talent in music, drama and entertainment;¹⁶

For radio drama the outcome has been plays of a range that comes close to rivalling that of BBC Radio 4, of a quality that bears direct comparison to the limited original drama on Radio 3. To celebrate the centenary of Samuel Beckett's birth in 2006, for example, RTÉ Radio 1 performed all seven of his radio plays and broadcast complete readings of all three novels. Unlike the BBC, however, RTÉ vigorously exploits its archival heritage. Thus in June 2006 the *Sunday Playhouse* marked the 150th

⁸ See Appendix 9c.

anniversary of the birth of George Bernard Shaw with archive productions including a classic *St Joan* from as long ago as January 1954.^h The *Tuesday Play* was devoted to past winners of the P J O'Connor Awards. O'Connor was RTÉ's Head of Radio Drama from 1971 until his death in 1981 and the memorial awards are the channel's vehicle for encouraging new writing in the thirty- and fifteen-minute formats. The *Tuesday Play* slot is also used for sitcom, including independent productions from Dublin's Crazy Dog Audio Theatre, and serials. RTÉ Radio 1 also has a regular children's drama slot on Saturday evenings, though not in June 2006.

Ireland, like New Zealand, has a flourishing community radio sector with drama an increasing presence. Flirt FM at the National University of Ireland in Galway "has a strong commitment to radio drama and every year in conjunction with Muscailt Festival [the university's annual arts festival] embarks upon the production of a radio drama";¹⁷ Connemara Community Radio won the 2001 New Adventures in Broadcasting Award for a series of documentaries that included the drama-documentary *The Lapwing's Lifeboat* by Brendan O'Scannail, about shipwrecked English sailors washed up in Connemara during World War II;¹⁸ and in August 2007 Near FM, a community radio station in North East Dublin announced the completion of "an original radio drama pilot" with the local Riverside Drama Group.¹⁹

15.3 The survival of American radio drama

The paradigm of 'Golden Age' American radio drama is the fifteen-minute adventure serial or the overly-sentimental matriarchal soap opera. But, as discussed in Chapter 5, there were also strands for serious single radio plays, certainly in *CBS Workshop* as radical as anything been broadcast anywhere else in the world. Pre-war *CBS Workshop* was radical both politically and artistically, perhaps more the latter, but Barnouw's 1945 collection *Radio Drama in Action: Twenty-five Plays of a Changing World* shows that political radicalism became more important than artistic experiment during the war itself. Barnouw includes Langston Hughes and Roi Ottley, dramatising

^h See Appendix 9d.

the Black American experience,ⁱ plays written about and on behalf of organised labour,^j even an example of Joseph Gottlieb's weekly series *The Halls of Congress* in which edited versions of debates in the legislature were re-enacted. Perhaps the most startling script in the collection is William N Robson's *Open Letter on Race Hatred* (1943), a thirty-minute plea for inter-racial harmony inspired by race riots in Detroit.^k Barnouw thought he was heralding the dawn of an age of literate, socially-conscious radio drama, but the following year mass market television arrived in the US.

The public clamoured for sets when they first became available, in the closing months of 1946, and an estimated 6000 television receivers were purchased. The very next year, thirty times that figure was sold. [Bannerman 1986: 188]

In 1945 scripts by Norman Corwin had been the automatic choice for the networks to celebrate the end of war;^l ten years later America's most celebrated radio writer could no longer get airtime on American commercial radio and his play for the United Nations, *A Charter in a Saucer*, was produced by the BBC.^m The single radio play had not died in America, though; it had gone 'public'.

American public service broadcasting began with the subscription-funded Pacifica in 1949.²⁰ National Public Radio was very much an afterthought to the Public Broadcasting Act (1967) which set up the non-commercial PBS television network in 1969; NPR followed in May 1971.²¹ NPR was a network whereas Pacifica was always more of a coalition of like-minded activists and today sees itself as "a listener-supported community radio network"²² with five stations and more than 100 affiliates. Both broadcasters have always seen radio drama as a key component of their cultural programming. Both, indeed, have overtly emulated the German model. Karl Schmidt's *Earplay* (the title a direct translation of *hörspiel*) ran on NPR from 1971 to 1981 and attracted writers of the calibre of David Mamet. John Madden's *Earplay* production of Arthur Kopit's stage play *Wings* won the Prix Italia in 1979. Pacifica's *SoundPlay* series, 1991-92, consisted of translations of actual *hörspiele*, including New *hörspiele*,

ⁱ *Booker T Washington in Atlanta* and *The Negro Domestic* respectively.

^j *Bretton Woods* by Peter Lyon, sponsored by the Congress of Industrial Organisations.

^k Robson had succeeded Reis as director of *CBS Workshop*.

^l *On a Note of Triumph* for VE Day, *14 August* for VJ Day.

^m Unfortunately the BBC production, starring Laurence Olivier, was not to Corwin's satisfaction. He told Douglas Bell, almost forty years later, "I had confidence that the BBC, which had long done distinguished work in radio, would do well by my script. It turned out I was wrong." [Corwin 1994: 117]

many of which had previously been broadcast by Pacifica's Berkeley station KPFA as *Hörspiel USA* in 1984. The texts in Frost and Herzfeld-Sander (1991) were prepared for *SoundPlay*.ⁿ The table below shows what can be achieved with grant aid, co-production and the use of archive. All the *SoundPlay* broadcasts lasted an hour: over the same period Pacifica also broadcast the *Radio Stage* series of thirty-minute radio originals which, whilst not strictly experimental, were certainly quirky and ambitious.^o

<i>Soundplay, Pacifica 1991-92</i>		
<i>Title</i>	<i>Dramatist</i>	<i>Production</i>
<i>The Flight of Lindbergh</i>	Brecht/Weill	Voices International (1991)
<i>The Outsider</i>	Wolfgang Bochert	Deutsche Welle, WGBH Boston, Voices International (1991)
<i>Dreams</i>	Günter Eich	Voices International (1991)
<i>The Other Woman and I</i>	Günter Eich	Bay Area Radio Drama (1984)
<i>The Good God of Manhattan</i>	Ingeborg Bachmann	Voices International (1991)
Experimental Radio Drama Programme 1:		
<i>Ursonate (part)</i>	Kurt Schwitters	RRG Stuttgart (1932)
<i>Ophelia and the Words</i>	Gerhard Rühm	Bay Area Radio Drama, WDR Cologne (1984)
<i>Five Man Humanity [New Hörspiel]</i>	Jandl/Mayröcker	Bay Area Radio Drama, WDR Cologne (1987)
<i>Monologue: Terry Jo</i>	Bense/Harig	Bay Area Radio Drama, WDR Cologne (1984)
<i>Gertrude</i>	Schiffer/Dürr	Bay Area Radio Drama (1984)
Experimental Radio Drama Programme 2:		
<i>Radio [New Hörspiel]</i>	Ferdinand Kriwet	WDR Cologne (1971)
<i>Wind and Sea [New Hörspiel]</i>	Peter Handke	WDR Cologne (1984)
<i>Radio Play (No. 1)</i>	Peter Handke	Voices International (1991) ^p
<i>Houses</i>	Jürgen Becker	Bay Area Radio Drama, WDR Cologne (1984)
<i>Centropolis</i>	Walter Adler	Bay Area Radio Drama (1984)
<i>The Tribune</i>	Mauricio Kagel	Voices International (1991)
<i>Breakfast in Miami</i>	Reinhard Lettau	Voices International (1990)
<i>Moscow Time [New Hörspiel]</i>	Helmut Kopetzky	Voices International (1989, remixed 1990)
<i>Roaratorio: An Irish Circus on Finnegans Wake [New Hörspiel]</i>	John Cage	WDR Cologne (1979)

NPR's generalist drama strands have included Brian Daley's thirteen-part adaptation of *Star Wars* in 1979 and *2000X* (2000), twenty-six sci-fi dramatisations and adaptations produced by Yuri Rasovsky for *NPR Playhouse*. Perhaps NPR's greatest achievement in drama, however, was bringing Norman Corwin back to radio. Corwin's

ⁿ See Frost and Herzfeld-Sander 1991: 307-309

^o For example, *Kafka's Radio* by Eric Overmyer (1992).

^p Other records in the Pacifica archive refer to recordings from 1988 and 1999.

We Hold These Truths had been updated for the 200th anniversary of the Bill of Rights in 1991 and simulcast on all national radio networks, both public and commercial, but it was NPR alone that broadcast the updated *14 August* in 1995. This was followed by new plays including *No Love Lost* (1996), a fictional debate between Aaron Burr (Jack Lemmon), Alexander Hamilton (Lloyd Bridges) and Thomas Jefferson (William Shatner), *The Writer with the Lamé Left Hand* (1997) about Cervantes, and Corwin's most recent play to date, *Memos to a New Millennium*, featuring Walter Cronkite (December 31 1999). Reliant on grant-aid and co-production for its drama output NPR closed its *Playhouse* on October 1 2002 and at the time of writing (September 2007) has no drama scheduled.

Pacifica's KPFA Berkeley currently hosts *Act One Radio Drama*, which includes productions by LA Theater Works, Bay Area Radio Drama and others, whilst WBAI New York offers two hours of rebroadcast "Old Time Radio" drama in *The Golden Age of Radio* on Sunday evenings and *Mass Backwards*, two hours of recorded contemporary radio drama from the English-speaking world in the small hours of Tuesday morning.

The target audience for *Mass Backwards* is clearly online, post-broadcast, and it is ironic that whilst the technology of television was thought to have killed off non-music radio entertainment, the technology that now threatens the dominance of television – the Internet – has reawakened interest in sound drama. Nostalgia sites celebrate Old Time Radio (OTR); Internet radio stations broadcast recordings round the clock. Golden Age serials had always been recorded for syndication purposes but the networks considered the archive to be without value – or, more specifically, impossible to demand royalties for, the rights having been dispersed through so many users. Likewise, the Writers' Guild of America waived the residual rights of the few radio writers who had not sold them outright to the networks in the first place. Thus countless American scripts and audio downloads are freely available over the Net.

The Internet-based sub-culture that developed around OTR in the 1990s inspired enterprising independent producers to recreate audio drama in a Golden Age style. Some specialised in dramatisations as an alternative to audio books; others developed into producers of genuine original radio drama, some of which began to be broadcast by

NPR, Pacifica and even some CBS affiliates in their local time-slots. The most innovative of these has been Susan Loewenberg's LA Theater Works, whose June 2006 productions included the *Worldplay* entry *Fired* by Annabelle Gurwitch, a comedy about actors' experiences of "creative differences". Another key broadcasting platform for the new American producers of radio drama is XM satellite radio's *Sonic Theater*. Given that XM claims 6 million subscribers, a thriving market for sound drama clearly still exists in 21st century America.

15.4 French and German radio drama

Both France and Germany were pioneers of radio drama. Both were silenced by the Nazis. When France was liberated in 1944 radio celebrated the defining quality of French art in the 20th century, the avant-garde. Immediately after the banning of Artaud's play, Pierre Schaeffer invented *music concrete* for RTF.⁹ Schaeffer's *Studio d'Essai* became the *Club d'Essai* which in turn became the progenitor of sound art which today flourishes all over the world. Germany, a defeated, fragmented country in 1945, had its radio services rebuilt in the image of its conquerors. North-West German Radio was reborn in the style of an idealised BBC under the guidance of BBC staff. As has been described above,[†] drama was at the heart of the British strategy for German radio.

Today, both nations have public sector broadcasters. Both have culture channels in the manner of BBC Radio 3 and because Germany has a genuine regional system it has multiple *Kultur* channels. In 2006 Radio France produced very little original radio drama – effectively one play a month – concentrating instead on prestigious adaptations of radical contemporary stage plays. The June offering, *La décennie rouge* (*The Red Decade*), was a specially commissioned two-hour piece about the Baader-Meinhof gang from the stage dramatist Michel Deutsch, following on from a series of Deutsch adaptations in 2005.²³

⁹ See Chapter 13.

[†] See Chapter 10.

La décennie rouge was the only play broadcast by Radio France in June 2006, the remainder of the month's *Cycles de theatre européen* slots being given over to readings of jazz poetry by Enzo Cormann. In July the featured play was Flemish was Flemish poet and dramatist Peter Verhelst's take on Shakespeare's *Richard III* in a double bill with *Rêve avec revolver*⁵ by the Argentinean theatre artist Lola Arias. both recordings of stage performances from Autumn 2005. The remainder of July was given over to broadcasts from the Avignon Festival, including events marking the Beckett centennial. French radio is therefore a minor player in terms of drama with scarcely any original plays and, in the summer of 2006 at least, hardly any French writing. That said, drama is given a prestigious two-hour slot on Sunday afternoon and maintains the French tradition of artistic radicalism and theatrical innovation.

Germany, on the other hand, when the output of the regional stations is combined as it so easily can be, online or on digital platforms, is the closest rival to the BBC in terms of output and range. Appendix 10 compiles all the radio drama which a German enthusiast could have accessed over the seven-day period May 30 to June 5 2006. On the face of it, comparing Appendix 10 with the same period in Appendix 8, the German listener is better served with drama – over 2000 minutes, excluding instant repeats, compared with the standard BBC output of between 700 and 800 minutes per week, excluding instant repeats and *The Archers*. However if the drama output of BBC7 (another 800 minutes) is added and *Kinderhörspiele* excluded, the totals become broadly comparable.

Kinderhörspiele are not negligible, however, but a proven means of securing future listeners. It is therefore praiseworthy that German radio, like RTÉ in Ireland, preserves the “Children's Hour” with which every broadcaster began their service in the 1920s. Also similar to Irish practice is the use of archive both for historical purposes (the Dieter Forte double bill on May 31, for example) and as a radiophonic repertory system, one *Kultur* channel re-broadcasting another's production, thereby effectively pooling costs. In other respects German radio drama is similar to the BBC model – both have classic serials and a penchant for crime drama; adaptations and dramatisations are programming staples, enlivened by the occasional dramatic feature (*Ein Romancier des*

⁵ Known as *Shotgun Dreaming* when performed in London in March 2005.

Radios, June 1). But the main difference relates to the original radio play and its status within the national culture. In Britain, as we have seen, radio drama's contribution to contemporary culture is principally as a training ground for future writers of stage plays and cinema films. In Germany, on the other hand, *hörspiele* have always been seen as artworks in their own right.

"In Germany," Peter M Lewis observes, "both in the pre-war Weimar period and after the war, writers and scholars involved themselves in radio with keen interest."²⁴ Bond, comparing what this study has called second period *hörspiele* with the high literature of the BBC Third and the more middlebrow *Saturday Night Theatre*, concludes, perhaps ungenerously:

The consequence for the sociology of literature was that German radio drama (*Hörspiele*) became a 'movement' in postwar literature, attracting established authors, broke into the publishing world, received critical attention and social recognition with public prizegivings in a way and on a scale far different from British radio drama. British radio drama remained a minority cultural pursuit, slightly cranky, hardly noticed critically, seldom published and then hardly ever with success, and very rarely attracting established writing talent.

[Bond 1973: 480]

The stations which Bond identifies as leading the *Hörspiele* movement in the 1960s, NDR Hamburg and WDR Cologne, were the two halves of the "British" North-West German Radio, which divided in 1956. NWDR had always been the best-resourced postwar German broadcaster and even after the split "each part was more wealthy than any other station in West Germany."²⁵ Over the period 1945-1965 writers' fees rose sharply in Germany but not in Britain. Bond supplies a table (pg. 488) showing that in 1949 a German radio dramatist received four times the fee of his or her British counterpart and by 1965 almost seven times more. On top of that, he describes how each region and stations in Austria and German-speaking Switzerland potentially paid a 50% repeat fee for the best plays. "In this way many plays have been ... repeated as many as 9 or 10 times."²⁶ Whilst it has not been possible to undertake a similar comparison of fees in 2006, no British radio play is repeated more than once and it can safely be assumed that writing for German radio is significantly more remunerative.

15.5 **Prix Italia and other international prizes for radio drama**

In 2006 the BBC had not won the Prix Italia for best original radio play since Anthony Minghella's play for dance and voices *Hang Up* in 1988, although David Zane Mairowitz's radiophonic opera *The Voluptuous Tango* won a special prize for fiction in 1997 and the BBC has dominated the recently-instituted prize for 'adapted' drama, winning with Tim Crouch's adapted stage show *My Arm* in 2005 and Peter Straughan's dramatisation of *M* in 2004. The BBC did not enter a play for the 2006 Prix Italia although Alison Hindell chaired the jury that awarded the prize to NPB in the Netherlands for Jeroen Stout's *Lee de Forest – Spirit of the Poiner*. NPB also won in 2005 with the equally radio-referential *Radio North Suriname*.

The Prix Europa for best European radio drama of 2006 went to Danish Radio (DR) and *Undervaerket (The Work of Wonder)* by Christian Lollike, whilst the Prix Europa Radio France was awarded to the German entry from RBB, *Amoklauf mein Kinderspiel (Running Amok – My Child's Game)* by Thomas Freyer. Interestingly, both winners focused on recent tragedies, respectively the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001 and a 2002 high school massacre. The British entries were *Watch the Spider* by Andrew McLay and *Unprotected* by Esther Wilson and others. In general the BBC does well at the Prix Europa, winning with Dennis Kelly's *The Colony* in 2004. Edna Walsh's *The monotonous life of little Miss P* was awarded a special commendation in 2003 as was Nick Fisher's *Vox Humana* in 1997. The key attribute of these successful entries, of course, is that they are atypical BBC productions: three come from the experimental strand *The Wire*, *Unprotected* was an improvised drama-documentary about street prostitution and Nick Fisher (see Chapter 13) is celebrated for innovation.

The New York International Radio Festival judges entrants on a different time cycle and the play that won the award announced on June 28 2007 for best regularly scheduled drama programme (John McKenna's *The Woman at the Window* for RTÉ Radio 1) was first broadcast as recently as April 1 2007. The best drama special was Radio Nederland Wereldomroep's Spanish language serial *El Misterio de la Ronda Nocturna (The Edges of the Night Watch)* by Bies van Ede (December 28-30 2006) about a missing portion of Rembrandt's painting and ABC Radio National won a

Bronze Award for the radio poem *What I Heard About Iraq* (March 20 2006), based on the writings of Eliot Weinberger.

15.6 Conclusions

In purely quantitative terms the BBC has only one serious rival, the collective output of the German regional public service broadcasters. In qualitative terms, however, the BBC certainly competes internationally but no longer dominates, and what successes it has are with atypical productions. It can, of course, be argued that this is because the British tradition is different or because the BBC has chosen to pursue different aims. There is, however, one highly respected award for radio that is British-only and thus in terms of drama a BBC monopoly. The 2006 Sony Award went to Normi Noel's *No Background Music*, an American play on an American subject – the Vietnam War – directed by an American, Gregory Whitehead. In itself this has no significance beyond the fact that it was a very good play expertly done. However the 2007 award went to another American play on a uniquely American theme, the adaptation of Thomas Wright's stage play about Death Row, *Lorelei*. In other words, those who make informed subjective assessments of contemporary radio drama – the jury panels for the principal awards – do not currently celebrate the homegrown British product, even where the BBC is the only entrant.¹

The question inevitably arises: do awards matter provided the audience appreciates the product? The answer has to be that they do. When evaluating a monopoly activity with no systematic qualitative research and little relevant quantitative data,² the commendation of one's peers is the only available measure. High status attracts writers of ambition, actors with reputations, and gives audiences confidence. Plays at the cutting edge are not and have never been the staple product of BBC radio drama, nor should they be in the future. Nevertheless the conclusion has to be that the BBC product

¹ The Tinniswood and Imison Awards, given by the Writers' Guild of Great Britain and the Society of Authors, went respectively to Nick Warburton's *Beast* and Nazrin Choudhury's *Mixed Blood*, both *Afternoon Plays* – see Appendix 8.

² RAJAR follows the traditional American model of measuring success in terms of 15-minute periods of listening, whereas the success of any drama (as Silvey recognised) relies on listening from beginning to end.

ceased to develop around 1990. Clearly there are reasons for this – finance, obviously, but also the low esteem in which the BBC itself seems to regard original radio drama, both of which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 17. There is also the issue raised by Bond and others: in Germany, Ireland and France the original single radio play is part of national culture; in Britain it clearly is not and yet the BBC has the same cultural responsibilities as ARD, RTÉ and Radio France. One way that other broadcasters maintain the cultural status of radio drama is by revisiting the achievements of the past. The BBC has probably the world's biggest archive of recorded matter and yet, in drama, makes no use of it whatsoever. That is the issue under discussion in the next chapter.

References

- ¹ Interview with Alison Hindell, Bush House, London, Wednesday March 14 2007
- ² MacDonald 1979: 231
- ³ Howard Fink, "The sponsor v. the nation's choice: North American radio drama" in Lewis 1981 p. 234.
- ⁴ Frick 1987: 4
- ⁵ Allan 1974: 1
- ⁶ *The Times*, 'Broadcasting', Wednesday August 24 1955, p. 4
- ⁷ Ship 1956: 17
- ⁸ Fink and Jackson 1987: 238
- ⁹ Rodney Pyrbus, "Radio drama: the Australian experience", in Lewis 1981: 250
- ¹⁰ Rodney Pyrbus, "Radio drama: the Australian experience", in Lewis 1981: 256
- ¹¹ Richards 1991: 147
- ¹² Sykes 1977: xx
- ¹³ History of Radio Drama in New Zealand: http://www.tki.org.nz/arts/drama/radio/history_e.php
- ¹⁴ Literature in New Zealand 1930-1960: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/literature-194060>
- ¹⁵ Fresh FM: <http://www.freshfm.ie/>
- ¹⁶ Radio and Television Act 1988, Part III Sound Broadcasting Services, section 6:2, the Determination of Applications. Available from the website of the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI): <http://www.bci.ie/>
- ¹⁷ Flirt FM: <http://www.craol.ie/cms/publish/flirtfm.shtml>
- ¹⁸ Connemara Community Radio: <http://www.craol.ie/cms/publish/connemararadio.shtml>
- ¹⁹ Near FM: <http://www.nearfm.ie/>
- ²⁰ Engelman 1996: 45
- ²¹ Engelman 1996: 94
- ²² Pacifica: <http://www.pacifica.org/about/>
- ²³ France Culture: <http://www.radiofrance.fr/chaines/france-culture/sites/fictions/calend.php>
- ²⁴ Lewis 2000: 163
- ²⁵ Bond 1973: 476
- ²⁶ Bond 1973: 482

Chapter 16: The use of archive

16.1 Introduction

Huwiler is justified in her criticism that “it is not unknown even today, for researchers to base their analysis on the printed version of a sound play. Whereas in film studies nobody would presume to confine their analysis to the script, this procedure has been adopted quite regularly in radio drama studies – with the result that those specifically acoustical features that are not described in the written script are excluded from the analysis.”¹

To take an extreme example, it was only through the original 1947 recording (widely available on CD and the Internet^a) that this researcher realised that Artaud’s *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu*^b has a classic three-act structure, with a musical interlude between Acts One and Two (“xylophonics”²) and the break between Acts Two and Three marked by a passage of Artaud screaming in a stairwell and stomping up and down the metal stairs. Odd as they may seem described here, these passages actually articulate Artaud’s theme for the listener. This is that pre-Columbian Americans were more civilised than their modern counterparts because they were ruled by their own nature rather than the intellectual construct that is God. Thus the xylophonics lead into Tutuguri tribal ritual and the second acoustic interlude is literally the primal scream of Artaud’s rebirth as a creature of spirit. The third act, titled “Conclusion”, appears on the page as dialogue but is revealed on the recording to be a monologue, Artaud the intellectual sophisticate interviewing the holy fool, Artaud *le Momo*.^c In this context the passage quoted earlier (“You are raving, Mr Artaud/You are mad”) becomes almost unbearable. Artaud, of course, *was* clinically insane, living – as the fifty invited guests who heard the private broadcast on February 5 1948 would all have known – at Dr Delmas’s clinic as a condition of his release from the asylum at Rodez.^d

^a The version used here was downloaded from <http://www.archive.org/details/Artaud-Pour-en-fini-avec-le-jugement-de-dieu-1947-1948>.

^b See Chapter 13.

^c Apparently “simpleton” or “village idiot” in Marseilles patois – see Artaud 1976: 656.

^d See Artaud 1976: 650-660.

Huwiler, therefore, is fully entitled to insist on considering radio drama only in performance – but Huwiler is a European academic studying European radio drama. As has been demonstrated in the last two chapters, European broadcasters – especially German and Irish broadcasters – celebrate their recorded drama archive whilst the BBC neglects its archive entirely. Classic radio plays are revived from time to time and Appendix 8 suggests this might be an increasing trend; BBC7 consists almost entirely of series and serials from the archive – yet the situation for the vast majority of single plays remains the same as it was in the 1930s, that is to say one performance, one repeat, and then oblivion.

Nevertheless, thousands of broadcast plays survive in the BBC's sound archive and are accessible through the National Sound Archive at the British Library. This chapter therefore samples "classic" BBC radio plays accessed through the NSA, specifically a number of works by D G Bridson and the original recordings of Samuel Beckett's *Works for Radio* released on a commercial basis by the BBC and British Library to mark the centenary in April 2006.

Academically, these plays demonstrate important additional context that can only be gained by listening. Culturally, they raise the question, why are we not hearing them today? The recording of Bridson's *March of the '45* was "heard by anything up to a hundred million listeners" between 1936 and 1969,³ and surely no one can doubt that Beckett's radio plays are intrinsic to his canon and thus cornerstones of 20th century drama as a whole. Yet the former has not been aired since 1989^c and Radio 3 marked the Beckett centenary with adaptations of the stage plays.

16.2 The "ghastly impermanence of the medium"

From the outset writers of serious drama were put off radio by what Sieveking called the "ghastly impermanence of the medium."⁴ Peach, who by 1931 had written more radio drama than anyone else, complained:

^c *Classic Features* series II, Radio 4 August 27 1989.

Once the microphone has been switched off and the unseen actors have dispersed, a wireless play is over, not merely for the time being but for all time: the vibrations which carried it to millions of listeners tremble away into eternal silence, never to be recaptured.
[Peach 1931: 8]

Gielgud was unshakeable in his belief that radio drama should be performed live in emulation of stage plays and it was not until the late 1940s, when writers and producers with a Features background began creating innovative drama for the Third, that plays began to be recorded for repeat purposes. From 1931, however, the BBC Transcription Service recorded some programmes for broadcast overseas.^f Plays were not a priority and thus the earliest dramatic work discussed in this study to have survived is Bridson's *March of the '45* (1936).

The transcriptions formed the basis of the BBC's in-house archive, founded in 1933,^g which because of its commercial value was not normally made available for study purposes. Thus Allan and Allan note in 1948, "The student [of radio drama] cannot buy a set of records of it, nor even – strangely – go to Broadcasting House and listen to its recording which is stacked away there."⁵ On those occasions when a broadcast became a phenomenon, most famously *Under Milk Wood* in 1954, it was not the BBC that cashed in by releasing their recording but the commercial Argos Records who engaged the original cast to perform a facsimile studio version.

Apart from Thomas, and the handful of playwrights who were able to publish their scripts, quality British radio drama has had at best a transitory cultural impact because it had no posterity – neither academics nor amateur enthusiasts could legally access it. In the BBC's defence it should be acknowledged that one reason for its reluctance to make the archive available was its zealous regard for the artistic rights of authors and actors. American broadcasters, for example, always preferred to buy all rights with the initial fee, hence the vast amount of "Old Time Radio" now available. Present day European broadcasters clearly buy a lengthy licence for online availability, whereas the Radio Drama Agreement^h limits the "Listen Again" facility to seven days after broadcast.

^f The date is taken from the anonymous introductory note to *BBC Sound Archives: Chronological Catalogue Volume 1 1852-1949* (August 1964).

^g The date is taken from Gary R Mitchell's invaluable BA dissertation *The Major Sound Archives of the United Kingdom*, North London Polytechnic 1984, pg. 16

^h See Chapter 1.

Comparatively few single plays were recorded by the Transcription Service, which always preferred classic adaptations and dramatisations.ⁱ After Gielgud's retirement in 1963 most if not all plays were routinely recorded but only a small proportion of these were placed in the archive. Moreover, inclusion in the archive has largely been a matter of subjective producer choice rather than objective artistic criteria. Among the many ironies which result is the fact that of all Gielgud's radio plays, only the radio version of *Party Manners*^j survives in the archive.

The National Sound Archive derives from the archive of the British Institute of Recorded Sound, founded in 1948 and transferred to the British Library in 1983.^k More recently the NSA has become the means by which members of the Library can access the BBC archive for listening on Library premises. Copies may be supplied of non-BBC items but the Library website^l specifically states that the BBC does not usually permit copies of copyright material, and of course almost all British radio drama – certainly all that was ever recorded – remains in copyright in 2007. The exception to this is the JISC-funded Archival Sounds Recordings Service launched in September 2006 which will offer online access to institutions but whose drama catalogue, initially at least, is limited to plays entered for the Sony Prize, which requires authors to sign an educational waiver.

The following exercise in using the National Sound Archive was prompted by Bridson's comment that, "Unlike so many other historic broadcasts, which have been pointlessly and wantonly destroyed, it is reassuring to know that *The Human Age* at least is preserved in the BBC archives in its entirety."⁶ In fact, Bridson is well served by his former employers. According to the *BBC Sound Archives Catalogue of Drama Recordings* (January 1970), *Aaron's Field*, *Aaron's Fallout Shelter*, *Johnny Miner* and *The Christmas Child* all survive. In October 2006 the NSA included *The March of the '45* and the original 1951 version of *The Childermass* digitised on the Library server,

ⁱ The same is true today. The November 2006 drama catalogue of BBC Radio International, successor to the Transcription Service, offers eight pages of Classic Serials, five pages of World Theatre and a section entirely devoted to Sherlock Holmes dramatisations, whereas the vast majority of original single plays are in the fifteen-minute format which Radio 3 and Radio 4 no longer use.

[See *SW - Drama Catalogue BBC Radio International.pdf*.]

^j June 11 1950

^k Mitchell 1984: 27

^l www.bl.uk

together with tapes of the 1947 revival of *Aaron's Field* and *Monstre Gai*, successor to *The Childermass*, from 1955. The third part of *The Human Age* trilogy, *Malign Fiesta*, was obtained on loan from the BBC on CD.^m

16.3 Bridson recordings in the National Sound Archive

The BBC, of course, has never regarded *The March of the '45* as a play. Listening, however, puts the matter beyond doubt.ⁿ Whilst heavily reliant on narration, a Features signature, the piece has a three-act structure (the Prince's arrival in Scotland, victory at Prestonpans, and the doomed crossing into England), and the characters are conceived in three dimensions. John Murray, for example, does not trust his kinsman George Murray, and thus encourages Prince Charles in his vainglorious adventure when George counsels caution. In one key passage Bridson's sense of drama overrides his sense of the history. The Manchester the Jacobite army bears down upon is the industrial Manchester of 1936, not the township that existed in 1745.

Headstocks line the lanes they followed... The fields
Are smouldering slag heaps... We have not been idle,
And staple industries have their yields...

Wigan her coal and iron... Also the mills---
In combine mostly... And the rubber-proofers...
Power and light by pylon from the hills... [Bridson 1950: 26]

The city fathers who reject the Prince's call to arms are not the Georgian worthies who capitulated in Perth but hardheaded modern Lancashire businessmen. "They may ring the bells, gentlemen, but there are various reasons why a restoration of the House of Stuart is undesirable. [...] The Stuarts, gentlemen, are poor businessmen."^o

As an example of regional broadcasting, the most striking thing to be learnt from the recording is that *The March of the '45* was a co-production "from Scotland and the

^m 1CDR0000703 NSA and 1CDR0000704 NSA (*The Childermass*) and T7274WR TR1 and TR2 (*Monstre Gai*). *Malign Fiesta*, loaned by the BBC archive, is catalogued as CDA25612.

ⁿ Classic Features 1 {THE}/BRIDSON: 1CDR0026611BD2NSA.

^o Transcribed from the NSA server, October 11 2006

North”.^p Bridson does not mention this in his memoirs; Allan and Allan, however, were aware of it in 1948: “The transmission switched back and forth between Glasgow and Manchester studios, as the setting altered from the Scottish to the British camps.”⁷ The recording – which the Allans, of course, did not have recourse to – shows this was not only impractical but did not happen. Scarcely any of the action takes place in the “British camps”, which would have left very little for Bridson to do in the Manchester studio. Equally, one only has to consider the technical challenge of remote cueing, presumably by telephone. Delay would have been unavoidable and there are no such *longeurs* on the recording. What we *can* hear is the fading up and down of Scottish music, pipes and folk songs, which suggests that the music was in Glasgow, the actors in Manchester.

Indeed, the “auditory backcloth”⁸ of *The March of the '45* demonstrates the extraordinary virtuosity of technique that the BBC had achieved in little more than a decade. The piece has true acoustic depth: the listener knows, without need of explanatory dialogue, that in Perth the clansmen are celebrating in the street below the room where their leaders confer. Such sound texturing was clearly commonplace because Bridson uses silence to point up the horror of the battle of Prestonpans. On the eve of the battle horses whinny and a distant bugle sounds. Close to, clansmen whisper with a local who knows a way through the quagmire. The battle begins to the rumble of the battle drum. Orchestral music underscores the advance – then all sounds cease. The carnage is described, not heard:

And the horse are trampling back on the guns
 As the shouting riders rein
 And wheel about in screaming fear
 To scatter away in a mad career
 Or stiffen amid the slain...

[Bridson 1950: 24]

This makes the deadening, one-dimensional acoustic setting of *Aaron's Field* in its 1947 revival⁹ all the more disconcerting. Aaron's rural idyll does not exist in sound terms; there is no birdsong, not even a breeze off the hills. There is therefore no change of acoustic when the declaration of war sends Aaron indoors, into what effectively will be his coffin. The Stranger's knock and the approaching bombers are there, inevitably,

^p Opening announcement.

⁹ T6596WR BD1

but the latter is no more threatening than an advancing lawnmower. Clearly Bridson was skilled in the use of non-verbal sound but chose not to use his skills for this production, with frankly disastrous consequences for the listener.

Again, Elkan and Dorotheen Allan, almost unique as commentators on technical aspects of radio drama immediately after World War II, furnish the explanation: “The gramophone record of mewling sea-gulls became a music-hall joke, and that of the car with its squealing brakes bored instead of thrilled... Effects were played out and some dramatists and producers cut them out altogether.”⁹

The duration of the Spartan phase of sound effects is illustrated by *The Human Age*, not the trilogy itself but the way in which this listener happened to listen to it in its archive form. In order to contextualise the problem it is necessary to outline the unique genesis of Bridson’s project.

Although Bridson describes himself as “a convinced left-winger” in the foreword to *The Filibuster*,¹⁰ his literary heroes were the fascist apologists Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis. Lewis’s bizarre moral fantasy *The Childermass* (1928) was ripe for dramatisation, particularly as the second half of the novel was written in dramatic form. Bridson’s dramatisation was broadcast on the Third Programme[†] with Donald Wolfit as the Bailiff and Robert Speaight as Hyperides.¹¹ The production was critically well received, prompting Bridson to approach Harman Grisewood, then Controller of the Third, with an unprecedented proposal.

I reminded him that the work was still no more than a fragment – the first part only of a trilogy projected as far back as 1928. I suggested that it would be an excellent thing if the BBC could see its way to making it possible for Lewis to write the other two parts of the work.¹²

This was a truly remarkable proposition as Lewis was nearly 70, unfashionable and blind. Yet Grisewood not only agreed but went further:

It was agreed that the two unwritten parts of the trilogy (now known as *The Human Age*) were to be conceived and written as novels, for publication as such. Before their publication, however, they would be adapted for radio presentation by Lewis and myself jointly.”¹³

[†] June 18 1951.

This then was more than dramatisation; it was the creation of a literary work in two forms simultaneously. Thus when Bridson came to cut and reorder the texts for production he “sketched out the link scenes as I felt they should open and close. As adaptation proceeded, sixteen additional passages proved necessary – ten for *Monstre Gai*, five for *Malign Fiesta*, and a final twist for *The Childermass*.” Lewis then wrote these scenes and “we finished our respective tasks neck and neck.”¹⁴ What resulted was a mammoth undertaking for any broadcaster, a continuing drama lasting six hours in unequal instalments,⁵ to be broadcast over three nights in the same week (May 24, 26 and 28 1955).

Essentially, *The Human Age* is a modernist take on Dante’s *Inferno*,¹ with *The Childermass* broadly the Limbo stage where the newly dead are assessed and moved on to the next stage of their afterlife. Thus Pullman, a bluff city gent, finds his onetime school fag Satterthwaite standing disorientated by the ferry that has brought him to the Magnetic City. The dead, apparently, spend the afterlife in the age at which they were most happy in life. Thus “Pulley” will spend eternity in early middle age whereas “Satters” will be forever a schoolboy. Bridson and his actor, Lewis Stringer, exploit the *double-entendre* of “fag” to a level of screeching camp that would not be acceptable today. Pulley and Satters are meant to be our modern-day Dante and Virgil but disappear, to all intents and purposes, after some thirty minutes. The remaining hour of the play consists of a debate between the philosopher Hyperides and Wolfit’s vulgarian Bailiff.

Dramatically, the play is unstructured, devoid of tension, and therefore fails to engage. We are given our hero and his supposedly comic sidekick but they are only spectators to the protracted central exchange between Hyperides and the Bailiff. Yet *The Childermass* is not a debate play in the style of *Red Tabs* or *Socrates Asks Why*; Gielgud and Linklater pose important questions about war and peace respectively whereas Lewis and Bridson are apparently more interested in words than ideas. Wolfit’s wildly plosive performance as the Bailiff provides comic relief but ultimately fails to distract from the fact that he is ranting and raving about nothing much. The version of *The Childermass* on the NSA server is the 1951 original, not the revised version from

⁵ 90 minutes for *The Childermass*, 150 minutes for *Monstre Gai* and 120 minutes for *Malign Fiesta*.

¹ See Bridson’s article, “A Modern *Divine Comedy*” in *Radio Times* May 22-28 1955 p.4

1955. It therefore shares the ‘dead’ acoustic of *Aaron’s Field* rather than the sound-in-depth conceptualisation of *Monstre Gai* and *Malign Fiesta*.

Doubtless because a dramatist helped shape the novels, the second and third plays of the trilogy have all the dramatic elements that the original so painfully lacked.^u Pullman is now inarguably the protagonist with Satters reduced to little more than a cameo. We follow Pullman as he explores his mysterious new world, a world not entirely dissimilar to a modernist utopia of plazas and cafés but occasionally visited by angels and devils of colossal proportions.^v Pullman now has a back-story – we are told he was a famous author in life – and is an active participant in (and in *Malign Fiesta*, shaper of) events around him. In *Monstre Gai* the Bailiff cultivates him as an ally in his war of wills with the saintly Padishah; in *Malign Fiesta* Pullman becomes counsellor-in-chief to Lord Sammael, the more-or-less human manifestation of Satan. Although the plays continue to be weighed down by incredible amounts of narration (so much so that on each recording we can hear James McKechnie’s voice start to fail), short, well-constructed scenes keep the narrative moving and the listener engaged. By 1955 Bridson had rediscovered the dramatic potential of the sound effect. In *Monstre Gai* the orchestral equivalent of a klaxon (Bridson calls it “the V2 theme”¹⁵) illustrates the sub-atomic effect of Heaven and Hell about to collide, and *Malign Fiesta* ends with the most radiogenic of all sound effects: “THE BOMBERS ROAR IN OVERHEAD.”¹⁶ Indeed, it was the soundscape that most impressed J C Trewin, who reviewed the trilogy for *The Listener*:

It is an astonishing phantasmagoria: one that D G Bridson has produced with fitting skill, both in the sinister silences and in those moments when, aided by Walter Goehr’s music, we have the kind of alarum that tears Hell’s concave and frightens ‘the reign of Chaos and old Night’.¹⁷

As well as tracing the abandonment and reinstatement of sound in the early 1950s, *The Human Age* also illustrates the changing role of recording. The title page of *The Childermass* script from 1951¹⁸ reveals that the play was pre-recorded between 3.00pm

^u The revised 1955 version no doubt matches the other two parts of the trilogy in production values, though it is hard to see how it could be shaped into a true drama.

^v “...*Malign Fiesta* seems to take us into a supernaturally swollen analogue of the world of Hollywood and mass communications with flashbacks to Auschwitz and previews of similar coming attractions.” Graham Hough, “The Human Age: Graham Hough on the trilogy by Wyndham Lewis”, *The Listener*, June 2 1955, p. 977

and 4.30pm on Monday June 18 and transmitted at 7.40pm that evening. In other words it was recorded-as-live, with no time for retakes or enhancements. In 1955 the three parts of the trilogy were recorded on May 1, 5 and 22 for broadcast more than a month later, leaving Bridson all the time he could want for retakes, edits and enhancements. Thus between 1951 and 1955 recording became part of the performance process; by 1959 and McWhinnie's recording of Beckett's *Embers* it had developed into a production tool essential to the dramatic purpose.

16.4 Beckett's "Works for Radio"

April 13 2006 being the centenary of Beckett's birth, all broadcasters of serious radio drama marked the occasion with anniversary revivals. RTÉ Radio 1 mounted new productions of all seven radio plays (including the translation/adaptation *The Old Tune*). In Canada, CBC 1's *Sunday Showcase* offered a two-part production of *Waiting for Godot*. HR2 in Frankfurt also revived *Godot* but other German broadcasters preferred archive productions of the radio plays. WDR 3 aired *Embers* in Günther Sauer's 1966 production whereas SWR 2 preferred McWhinnie's production, in German, from 1959. SWR 2 also broadcast a double-bill of *Words and Music* and *Cascando* from 1963, the 1978 production of *Rough for Radio II* and Fritz Schröder-Jahn's original 1957 production of *All That Fall*.^w The BBC, however, which had commissioned *All That Fall* and Beckett's subsequent radio experiments, marked the centenary with a *Beckett Evening*, which included a new production of *Embers* alongside adaptations of *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Not I*, a biographical *Afternoon Play*, Mark Burgess's *Sam o' Bedlam*, and John Tydeman's revival of *Godot* for *Drama on 3*. The BBC clearly could have broadcast archive productions had it chosen to, as the original BBC recordings were issued, through the British Library/National Sound Archive, as *Works for Radio*, a four-CD set.¹⁹

^w Information on German archive productions for the Beckett centenary was gathered from the websites cited in Chapter 15 and the *Hörspiel-Archiv* at <http://www.hoerspiel-archiv.de/>.

All That Fall opens the collection and is a disconcerting listening experience. The much-discussed sound effects^x are a disappointment. The opening animal sounds are obviously men baaing and quacking but serve their purpose by alerting the listener to the fact that the world of the ensuing play might not be entirely realistic. Other effects, however, are bizarre. Slocum's jalopy, for example, barks instead of hooting, and the listener is left to wonder why. Maddy's "dragging" footsteps are replaced by beats on a kettledrum, the tap of Dan's cane by a thudding bass – not so much "musical in conception" as McWhinnie described them²⁰ but literally music. Whilst the drumbeats are not a particular distraction to the listener they seem to have distracted one of the principal actors: J G Devlin as Dan continues to vocalise the effort of walking over his drumbeats whereas Mary O'Farrell as Maddy abandons vocal effort the instant the beats take over, thus negating the dramatic point of the physical exertion required for Maddy's trek to the station. Indeed, O'Farrell's reading is so at odds with Beckett's text, missing completely the bucolic humour, that one suspects what has been recorded is the technical rehearsal rather than the performance as broadcast. Certainly, McWhinnie seems to have heard something different to what is on the CD. For example:

At last the train arrives, and in production it is impossible to exaggerate this moment. The sound-complex in its grotesque fantasy must fulfil the wildest expectations and fears of the people who have been biting their nails on the platform; we should hear it as the nightmare realisation of their own heightened anxiety.
[McWhinnie 1959: 146-147]

The train on the recording, however, is feeble; far from yelling over the "rush of train" as the text requires, O'Farrell barely has to raise her voice. It is interesting that the *Times* reviewer, writing the day after the broadcast, makes no mention of the celebrated radiophonic effects but instead describes naturalistic sounds, Maddy leading Dan home "with the wind whistling in their faces and the wayside asses braying derisively."²¹

By the time of *Embers*, McWhinnie had realised that the entirety of Beckett's acoustic concept is given on the page. Thus Henry's rambling recollections beside the sea are set against realistic waves breaking on realistic shingle, albeit overlaid with an eerie but effective electronic hum, "a mournful diapason echoing through the ebb and

^x See Chapter 10.

flow of the sea, [which] continues throughout the play, giving it a unity of tone and accompanying all violent outbursts with a bass note of static despair.”²²

All That Fall may have been recorded-as-live but *Embers* is pre-recorded and the recording then manipulated in order to achieve Beckett’s dramatic aim, notably in the two short ‘Addie’ scenes, where Beckett specifies “ADDIE’s wail amplified to paroxysm, then suddenly cut off.”²³ This McWhinnie achieves with amplification, reverberation *and* distortion.

Words and Music (1962) has no need of radiophonic effects, being a straightforward contest between the component parts for the affections of ancient, pain-wracked Croak. Producer Michael Bakewell furnishes a plain setting that showcases the atypical prolixity of Beckett’s Words and the lyrical beauty of his cousin John Beckett’s Music. *Cascando* (1964) is produced by McWhinnie but he follows Bakewell’s example, letting Beckett’s text be sufficient unto itself.

Rough for Radio II (1976) is an oddment, an inferior collage of the earlier radio works: the cylindrical ruler from *Embers*, Fox’s monologues interchangeable with Word’s, the Stenographer’s “Shall I open with yesterday’s close?”²⁴ a clumsy in-joke reference to *Cascando*’s Opener. Martin Esslin’s production is itself radio-referential, featuring Harold Pinter as the Animator – Pinter, creator of *A Slight Ache*’s silent matchseller, acting in another radio play with a mute character. Interestingly, though, *Rough for Radio II* contains Beckett’s requirements of a producer, in “our standing exhortations”:

1. Kindly to refrain from recording mere animal cries, they serve only to indispose us.
2. Kindly to provide a strictly literal transcript, the meanest syllable has, or may have, its importance. [Beckett 1986: 276]

Esslin certainly supplies a literal rendition – we can be confident that really is the specified bull’s pizzle we hear swishing. Ultimately, his direction is too reverential. Pinter’s performance, particularly, is actorly where it should be abstract.

Whilst the individual productions in the collection have their strengths and weaknesses, the overriding conclusion, impossible to derive from the printed texts or academic comment, is that Beckett’s radio plays *as performed* are unmistakably a

development of the BBC tradition of poetic radio drama that began with *The March of the '45*. Stripped of the mannered and counterproductive radiophonic effects, *All That Fall* is not very far removed from *The Christmas Child*, still less from *The Rescue*.

16.5 Conclusions

The archive of recorded radio plays is selective but nevertheless massive, albeit ill-served by cataloguing that is inadequate at every level – for example, *The March of the '45*, recorded for the Transcription Service in 1936, is only catalogued by the British Library and in the BBC's online trial catalogue as part of the *Classic Features* series in 1989. Where a recording has not survived, a script may well have done in the Written Archives at Caversham. Literary or production merit has never been the deciding factor determining preservation, and any modern dramaturgical reassessment is equally subjective. What remains inarguable is that the archive contains works of international artistic consequence by Beckett and others, and vast amounts of lesser material of historical or simple nostalgic interest.

At a time when the BBC is convinced that a less than anticipated licence fee settlement necessarily means cuts in production,^y when the nostalgia channel BBC 7 “has been a significant driver in the take-up of DAB”²⁵ and when the Corporation is spending many millions putting its “entire video archive ... a treasure trove of 1.2 million hours of film” online for free,²⁶ it is inexplicable that archived radio plays should continue to be overlooked, particularly when the Listen Again service (for all output) “already attracts 13 million listeners every month.”²⁷

Online or on-air, there are rights issues to be settled regarding use of the archive, but no more so than in television. There may well be practical or aesthetic problems encountered in broadcasting archive plays but nothing that cannot be overcome with digital editing. For example, Lewis Stringer's problematic characterisation of Satters in

^y See Chapter 17.

The Human Age could be replaced with a less strident performance in the same way that Alison Hindell added Richard Burton to her 2003 revival of *Under Milk Wood*.²

The single radio play is only an art form when a cultured audience has access to as much of the canon as survives. In 2004 the BBC pledged itself to “maintain the creative revival of drama, focused on originality and challenge, across radio and television.”²⁸ In what are held to be straitened times, broadcasting from the archive is one cost-effective means of honouring that commitment.

References

- ¹ Huwiler 2005: 49-50
² Artaud, letter to Fernand Pouey and René Guignard, February 17 1948 (Artaud 1976: 584)
³ Bridson 1971: 57
⁴ Sieveking 1934: 15
⁵ Allan and Allan 1948: 92
⁶ Bridson 1971: 191
⁷ Allan and Allan 1948: 99
⁸ Allan and Allan 1948: 99
⁹ Allan and Allan 1948: 113
¹⁰ Bridson (1972) p xi
¹¹ D G Bridson, “The Making of *The Human Age*”, *Agenda*, Wyndham Lewis Special Issue, Vol 7 No 3 – Vol 8 No 1 (3 issues), Autumn-Winter 1969-1970, pp 164-165
¹² *Ibid*, p 165
¹³ *Ibid*, p 166
¹⁴ *Ibid*, p 167
¹⁵ *Monstre Gai*, WAC microfiche of Bridson’s production script, p. 88
¹⁶ *Malign Fiesta*, WAC microfiche of Bridson’s production script, p. 67
¹⁷ J C Trewin, *The Listener*, June 2 1955, p. 995. The quotation is from *Paradise Lost* (l 542).
¹⁸ *The Childermass*, WAC microfiche of Bridson’s production script, p. 1
¹⁹ NSACD 24-27
²⁰ McWhinnie 1959: 85
²¹ “A Successor to ‘Waiting for Godot’: Mr Beckett’s ‘All That Fall’”, *The Times*, Monday January 14 1957, pg 4
²² “Samuel Beckett’s New Play: Poignant Achievement”, *The Times*, Thursday June 25 1959, pg 5
²³ Beckett 1986: 259
²⁴ Beckett 1986: 276
²⁵ *A public service for all: the BBC in the digital age*, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, March 2006, para 4.4.2, pg 27.
²⁶ Ian Burrell, “Ashley Highfield: ’99 per cent of the BBC archives is on the shelves. We ought to liberate it”, *The Independent*, August 14 2006.
²⁷ Ian Burrell, “Ashley Highfield: ’99 per cent of the BBC archives is on the shelves. We ought to liberate it”, *The Independent*, August 14 2006.
²⁸ *Building public value: Renewing the BBC for a digital world*, BBC, June 2004.

² See Chapter 8.

Chapter 17: The challenges for British radio drama

17.1 Introduction

Having established over the preceding chapters that British radio drama – that is to say, BBC radio drama – was quantitatively and in its generalist strands in robust health in 2006 but could no longer claim to be at the leading edge internationally in terms of either innovation or cultural prestige, two questions arise. Firstly, what caused the brake on development from the late 1980s on; and secondly, assuming that art forms need to develop in order to survive, what if any encouragement can be derived from current trends?

This chapter therefore considers the institutional context in which BBC radio drama has been produced over the last two decades, an era of externally-imposed financial restrictions which led to the in-house regime of Producer Choice, and goes on to consider the challenges for the form implicit in the lower than anticipated licence fee settlement which accompanied the BBC's eighth Royal Charter in 2007 at the same time the new governing body, the BBC Trust, was given specific aims and purposes including “stimulating creativity and cultural excellence.”¹

Radio drama also needs to find its place within a rapidly changing technological context. Before the Millennium the consensus was that digital convergence would signal the end of radio as a progressive medium; if it continued at all, it would only do so as a personal jukebox or as an interactive news and debate platform. In practice, however, radio – particularly BBC radio – has benefitted from convergence to a far greater extent than any other pre-existing medium. Far from losing an audience, it has widened its audience on- and off-line and having always been ubiquitous radio is now becoming universal. Increasing ways of consuming radio, it is argued here, has specific implications for drama.

Finally, this chapter brings together the themes that have emerged during this study, not only to contextualise the condition of radio drama at the end of the study period but also to address the underlying question of why radio drama still matters.

17.2 The institutional context: Producer Choice

Central to any discussion of the contemporary condition of British radio drama must be the impact on BBC production of the lower than anticipated licence fee increase announced in January 2007. The last time BBC financial growth was checked the consequences for radio drama were severe and contributed significantly to a lack of development of the British form.

Barnett and Curry (1994: 24) describe how in March 1985 the BBC sought to persuade the Thatcher government to endorse an increase in the licence fee from £46 to £65 for three years, an overall increase of 41.5%. The government restricted the rise to £58 for two years (a 26% increase) and set up a committee of inquiry under the economist Professor Alan Peacock to scrutinise BBC finances.

Twenty years on it seems incredible that allowing the BBC to increase its income by a quarter without any matching increase in service should be seen as antagonistic. The Peacock Committee, on the other hand, was almost certainly intended to curb any aspirations to independence within the Corporation. The committee, however, concerned itself solely with the *zeitgeist* of the time, imposing competition and private sector business practices on the most influential of all quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations. Thus when the committee reported in July 1986 it recommended selling off Radio 1 and Radio 2; Radios 4 and 3, the platforms for drama, were held to be both sacrosanct and unsellable.^a To general surprise, Peacock opposed advertising on the BBC.² The way to introduce commercial practices, in Peacock's view, was to impose a quota for independent production. In November 1986 Home Secretary Douglas Hurd set the quota at 25% *for television*. There was never an official quota for radio, not because radio was considered to be above such things but because non-music radio was not considered at all. In corporate terms the period 1986-2000 was the nadir of radio which, apart from Radio 1 and a handful of flagship programmes on Radio 4 (*Today* and *The Archers*, for example), was generally held to be a broadcasting backwater. Radio nevertheless adopted the quota concept voluntarily albeit there were

^a See O'Malley 1994: 109-110.

no significant financial savings, given radio's minimal overheads, and for drama no radically innovative independent producers.^b Most independent providers set up after 1986 have involved ex-BBC staff and all produce *ersatz* BBC radio drama indistinguishable from the in-house product.

In July 1986 the Chair of Governors, Stuart Young, died suddenly and was replaced by Marmaduke Hussey. Every Chair of Governors since Lord Clarendon in 1927 has been a government placeman – at the time of his death Stuart Young's brother was a serving cabinet member – so there was nothing unusual or alarming about Hussey's appointment. His actions, however, were even more politically partisan than Lord Simon's banning of *Party Manners* back in 1950. In January 1987 the Director-General Alasdair Milne, a *Tonight* reporter in the 1960s, was sacked and replaced by the in-house accountant Michael Checkland. "For the first time in over forty years," Barnett and Curry note, "an institution devoted wholly to the making of radio and television programmes had as its leader a man who had never in his life made a radio or television programme."³ Checkland's deputy was John Birt, previously Director of Programmes at London Weekend Television, whose programme-making background was in news and current affairs. Birt succeeded Checkland as Director-General in January 1993 and three months later, on April 1, imposed Producer Choice throughout the BBC.

The roots of Producer Choice dated back to the late 1960s when a series of reports (the McKinsey reports 1968-70) recommended "that output directorates, under designated managing directors and chief accountants, should hold funds from the corporate centre and be accountable for their expenditure."⁴ McKinsey's aim had been to control expenditure by reducing waste and bureaucracy. However, because radio requires so few physical resources, "the effect of Producer Choice was to generate a large number of transactions for insignificant amounts of money, increasing bureaucracy without generating the efficiency savings claimed for the system in television."⁵

Far more damaging to broadcast drama in general and radio drama in particular was the by-product of Producer Choice, the pitch culture that emerged within the BBC whereby "programme makers have to earn their income, by selling their programme

^b Such as Dublin's Crazy Dog Audio Theatre, for example.

ideas to channel controllers, in competition with one another and to some degree with independent producers.”⁶ Beneath the channel controllers were a series of commissioning editors who controlled a time of day (morning, afternoon, evening) rather than a programme type or genre.⁷ Peter M Lewis observed the consequences for radio drama:

Radio drama producers often found themselves having to pitch to a commissioning editor who had no knowledge of their field. A proposal backed by the department for a play by the well-known dramatist, John Arden, was rejected and only rescued by counting it as an open commission for another slot. In this period, in an effort that consumed a great deal of time, the department was having to make four or five offers for every production that went on air.

[Lewis 2004: 166]

The 1990s cross-media obsession with pitching – by no means confined to the BBC – was satirised in Robert Altman’s film *The Player* (1992). On the positive side pitching ensures that all parties have a coherent understanding of what is proposed and preparing to pitch can often reveal structural weaknesses. Negatively, however, and particularly when pitching to non-creative decision-makers, there is a tendency to find a basis of understanding by comparing the proposed work with an existing successful piece which the decision-maker, as a consumer of media, can be expected to know. Pitching therefore encourages homogeneity whereas in art, even so-called ‘popular’ art, it is the exceptional that drives development.

For the BBC in the era of Producer Choice, pitching meant there was no need for a central script unit, which closed following a major corporate restructuring exercise in 1996.⁸ Writers were expected to pitch to a producer who would then require a synopsis from which he or she could construct their own pitch to the commissioning editors. Peter M Lewis, who had been an observer in the Radio Drama Department 1985-87,⁹ describes what was lost from the production viewpoint:

In the Radio Drama Department the weekly Script Unit meeting allowed ideas to be debated among peers before they were formally submitted to the network controllers. It was not uncommon for an idea that was initially rejected to be reinstated after argument. These debates ... were marinated in a shared cultural capital and an institutional memory which was at once rich and daunting.

[Lewis 2004: 162]

⁹ At which period, Lewis notes, 10,000 scripts passed through the Script Unit annually.

Stanton, similarly, describes the loss of support for new writing:

The radio drama script unit functioned like the literary department of many national theatre companies, acting as both receiver and initial 'filter' for the hundreds of scripts submitted by known and unknown writers each month. All of these were commented on by teams of readers, and those writers who showed some potential for the medium were helped to develop their craft in a dialogue with script editors and producers... [Stanton 2004: 59]

The headline change implemented by the 1996 restructuring involved "replacing the integrated television and radio directorates with the new BBC Broadcast and BBC Production, which were intended to become separate trading bodies."⁹ Anne Karpf considered the impact of "bi-mediality" for radio drama in a *Guardian* article:

Here's what's been ordained. Where once there was a drama department – granted, London-weighted – which covered producers and writers in all the production areas around the country, now these are to be split off. The rump of the powerful drama department will simply become a small group of London drama producers who'll pitch to James Boyle [controller of Radio 4], in competition with their former siblings in Manchester and Birmingham (all part of BBC Production...). But drama producers in Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast, the so-called national regions, will be part of the other big bloc, BBC Broadcast ... and therefore organised in a different way.¹⁰

Given that this was a yet another organisational change made against a background of continued job losses,^d Karpf concluded: "morale among radio drama producers is at an unprecedented low."

It is often asserted that Birt's radical reforms 'saved' the BBC, yet by the time he became Director-General the Corporation was under no threat from the less hostile Conservative government of John Major. Harris and Wegg-Prosser, in 1998, came to the more realistic conclusion that "the BBC is better positioned to survive in the new broadcasting landscape of convergence than it would have been if Producer Choice had not been implemented."¹¹ The counter argument is that "Birtist management was responsible for eroding the BBC's creativity."¹² The prime imperative in the mid 1980s had been to reduce spiralling costs, and there was certainly justification for that given the scale of the annual increases the BBC had come to expect. Competition and the internal market were accounting fads of the period and had little impact on radio

^d In the first year of Producer Choice there were 1500 redundancies across the BBC [McDonald 1995: 51].

practices. Producer Choice, however, prized process over product and commissioners with no personal experience of the form they were responsible for inevitably stifled innovation. Bi-mediality intensified the existing tendency to regard radio as at best a training ground for television^e and the loss of the Radio Drama Script Unit drastically reduced opportunities for new writers.

One of Greg Dyke's first acts on taking over as Director-General in 2000 was "to junk bi-mediality"¹³ and reverse the Broadcast/Production split. Confidence was restored to creative personnel by installing managers with hands-on experience of their form^f whilst a new unified script unit tailored for the computer age, the Writers' Room,^g restored and reinvigorated a genuine open-door policy, not least with the free-to-download script formatting software Script Smart.

17.3 The financial context: the licence fee settlement 2007

As noted at the very beginning of this study, Greg Dyke resigned in the aftermath of the Gilligan affair in 2004. His successor, Mark Thompson, therefore had to immediately tackle the challenge of not only securing the BBC's future in a multi-channel, multi-platform age, but (it seemed to some at the time) prolonging its existence beyond the term of the current charter.

As it transpired the Labour government committed itself quite early in the process to renewing the charter for the eighth time but there was nevertheless a price to be paid. Some services would have to leave London for a new facility in Salford, a move of concern to employees who would have to choose between relocation and resignation but to many media consumers and practitioners outside the capital a long overdue breakup of the metropolitan stranglehold on British broadcasting. After eighty years the Board of Governors was abolished and replaced with a Board of Trustees, still government-appointed but with a new remit as "custodian of the BBC's purposes, the licence fee and

^e The most telling evidence of this is in Born (2004). She describes attending regular bi-medial drama commissioning sessions but makes no mention of radio drama.

^f The process actually began at the end of Birt's term with the appointment of Jenny Abramsky as Director of Radio in January 1999 [Lewis 2004: 172].

^g <http://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/>.

the public interest”¹⁴ – less the commercial sector concept of a Board of Directors, more the local government Scrutiny Board. Moreover, the BBC would have to take the lead in – and assume the bulk of the costs of – the switchover to digital broadcasting by 2012.

The BBC accepted that the era of double-figure licence-fee increases was long since over but nevertheless expected the costs of switchover to be incorporated into the financial settlement. In October 2006 Thompson published his proposal for an increase in the licence fee of the Retail Price Index measure of inflation (RPI) plus 2.3% a year for six years from April 2007.¹⁵ By the end of 2006 the final submission had reduced to RPI plus 1.8%.¹⁶ In January 2007 the Government announced its decision: a fixed increase of 3% in years 1 and 2 and 2% per annum for the subsequent four years.^h This the BBC characterised as RPI plus 1.5%, necessitating budget cuts of 3.7% per annum.¹⁷

The arguments for and against a settlement above or below inflation are not relevant here. The fact is that the ninth decade of the BBC will not be an expansionary one. The decision on how to cut costs – whether to make across-the-board percentage economies or to target specific areas or services – was delayed for ten months. In October 2007 the Trust approved Thompson’s proposal to cut 2500 posts (and create 900 new posts in the regions, mostly Salford), sell off some of the Corporation’s lucrative property portfolio in central London and make “efficiency savings” of 3% a year.¹⁸ The Audio and Music division was set to lose 65-75 posts, a tenth of the number anticipated for Vision (640-660) and half the number in Future Media and Technology (120-130)¹⁹ – but of course radio is a much smaller employer than television. Yvette Mackenzie of *Broadcast* quoted a “BBC spokesman” who confided, “There was less scope for saving in radio because the sector has always been quite squeezed.”²⁰ The imperative for Audio and Music – and radio drama – would therefore be “improving value from its investment in content,” primarily through repeats: “Much Audio and Music output is broadcast only once, and it is believed the audience would not be averse to a judicious use of repeats in some areas.”²¹

^h Plus a separate agreed fund of £600m for the targeted help scheme to assist people on low incomes with the acquisition of digital equipment.

17.4 The technological context: convergence

Whilst it is true that the majority of British radio plays are only broadcast once, it does not follow that they can only be heard or listened to once. Nowadays every major radio broadcaster around the world offers some sort of listen-again service but BBC radio drama led the field. As Ian Burrell noted in an article marking the re-launch of the BBC Radio Player in January 2005, “The strength of public demand for keeping up to date with *The Archers* was the cornerstone on which the BBC developed the Radio Player concept.”²² Burrell also reported that by December 2004, only eighteen months after the introduction of the Radio Player in June 2002, *The Archers* was attracted a monthly on-demand audience of over 400,000 a month whilst the *Afternoon Play* drew 100,000. Figures for online listening (and the Radio Player was also the mechanism for live Internet listening) are reliable because they are mechanically collected, unlike RAJAR figures which are extrapolated from a small sample of ultimately self-selecting volunteers who keep a listening log. Listening to radio through the computer proved more popular than DAB radios with some listeners because Digital Audio Broadcasting lost its unique selling point of superior sound quality as bandwidth was reduced. The problem was serious for music, especially ‘serious’ music, but less so for speech-based programming which requires less bandwidth for satisfactory listening.ⁱ

The BBC Radio Player has proved so successful that it became the iPlayer in mid December 2007, the tool for accessing all BBC programming online, both radio and television, be it live, listen-again or, increasingly, archive. Even so the iPlayer requires the consumer to be at or near a computer and, for listen-again, limits the period for which a programme is available – currently seven days after broadcast, although the archival nature of BBC7 means one can on occasion access programmes of considerable age. The aspects of what might be called contemporary digital listening that the iPlayer *does not* meet are portability and permanence.

ⁱ Charles Arthur of the *Guardian* (“Is digital radio really any better than analogue?” Tuesday January 17 2006) stated that for stereo music 192kb/s is required compared to 96kb/s for speech. See also Bobbie Johnson, “DAB gets a poor reception” *Media Guardian*, Monday October 9 2006.

When discussions about media convergence began in the 1990s the debate centred on issues of physical integration (all media available on one piece of equipment), accessibility and interaction. In practice the issues have proved to be ubiquity (media available on *any and all* equipment), portability and time-shift consumption.

In the 1990s media commentators forecast the end of radio as a mass medium, assuming no home for the simplest of all media technologies in a complex, competitive digital millennium. The opposite has proved to be the case, with radio entering a third age^j as the most successful online medium. Jenny Abramsky, BBC Director of Audio and Music, told *Broadcast* magazine's Radio 3.0 conference at the Waldorf Hotel, London, in May 2007:

Just five years ago the BBC's radio websites gained an average of 20 million page impressions a month. In March 2007 there were 139 million. We had 15 million live listening hours on the Internet and 13 million on-demand requests that same month.^k When the BBC decided to put its radio stations on digital television ... we had no idea that five years later 41% of the UK audience would listen to radio through their television screen and at least 23% once a week. More than 26 million people now say they own a DAB digital radio or have listened via digital television or the Internet.²³

Andrew Harrison, Chief Executive of the Radio Centre and representing the commercial radio sector, told the conference:

Digital radio fits on all devices... Radio's always been portable but now it will be ubiquitous. More devices mean more opportunities to listen, new occasions for radio consumption, and radio's reach is rising as a result... Secondly, radio's a natural accompaniment to other activity. You can consume it while doing something else. This builds listening hours.²⁴

What Abramsky and Harrison fail to mention is that the most popular way of consuming radio on a personal mp3 player, mobile phone or PDA is the area in which the broadcaster loses control and to a certain extent ownership of its product, the podcast. Podcasting is a very recent development: the first regular BBC radio programme to be offered as a podcast was *In Our Time* in November 2004.²⁵ Three years later, podcasting is as ubiquitous as radio itself with newspapers and even television making use of download audio. A podcast does not have to be a

^j By this measure the first age was pre-war, with communal listening via large static receivers, the second age was the era of the transistor – portable and predominantly personal listening.

^k Conventional listening for the same period totalled 474 million hours, Abramsky said.

downloadable version of the programme as it was broadcast, although it often is, nor does it ever have to have been broadcast at all – many of the thousands of Internet-only radio stations, often entirely amateur, only offer podcasts. At the time of writing (December 2007) the only dramas offered by the BBC as podcasts are *The Archers* and *Silver Street*, soap operas wherein the Corporation holds all the creative rights. The problems preventing the podcasting of drama created and owned by the writer are said to be copyright and lack of a perceived demand. The latter is simply an unknown which could be clarified by specific research; consumers demonstrably access plays through the iPlayer so it is reasonable to assume they might prefer to listen through a portable device and extend the potential time-shift indefinitely, as with video or digital recording of television. The copyright problem is exactly the same problem originally envisaged with home video recorders and has long applied to radio-cassette recorders: provided the recording is for personal, not-for-profit consumption there is no realistic prospect of a successful breach-of-copyright claim in the courts. The answer to the problem is either contractual (buying the rights), consensual (Creative Commons¹) or technological (self-deletion after a given period) and will probably be settled in relation to popular music downloads. In the meantime it is worth noting that the BBC has established a precedent for additional payment by agreeing a token £5 to the writer of each podcast episode of *The Archers* and that one innovative producer of radio drama has already offered free podcasts of its productions.

LA Theatre Works^m has the usual listen-again facility for its weekly *The Play's the Thing* productions on the webpages of its various public radio partnersⁿ where they can be streamed in full for seven days after broadcast. Thereafter they offer the first fifteen minutes as an encouragement to purchase a full download from the Theatre Works' own site.^o However their 2007 *Relativity Series*, about significant moments in the history of science, was made available as a free podcast for three months after broadcast. All the featured plays were subject to copyright – for example, Brecht's *Life of Galileo* (1939) in a new version prepared for the National Theatre, London, by Sir David Hare – so the rights issue had evidently been overcome. Significantly, *Life of Galileo* was produced

¹ See below, 17.6

^m See above, Chapter 15.

ⁿ For example 89.3 KPCC Southern California Public Radio (<http://www.kpcc.org>).

^o <http://www.ltw.org>.

by the English actor Martin Jarvis who with his wife, the actress Rosalind Ayres, owns Jarvis & Ayres Productions one of the BBC's key independent suppliers of radio drama.

17.5 Trends in BBC radio drama in 2007

Having survived the era of change for change's sake, albeit with a loss of posts and a slowing of artistic development, having temporarily lost its status to bi-mediality and sacrificed its script unit to Producer Choice, BBC radio drama at the end of the financial year 2006-7 was in surprisingly robust condition. Yet Alison Hindell began our conversation in March 2007 with the statement: "If your stance is that radio drama is a unique home for new writing and the single play I would say that I fear that radio drama is on the brink of a descent."²⁶ She was speaking, of course, after the financial settlement had been announced but before the package of 'savings' had been determined. Nine months later it is still not possible to say with any confidence what the effect of the 'disappointing' licence fee will be on radio drama. Although there is an official freeze on recruitment at the BBC, no posts have yet been cut and no member of staff has yet had to face compulsory redundancy. All plays broadcast during 2007 would have been commissioned before Thompson's announcement in October but the autumn schedule would have been compiled with straitened circumstances in mind.

Appendix 11 provides a snapshot of a week in that schedule, chosen at random and compared with the same week in 2006. Overall, there is a similar mix of new productions and repeats, originals, adaptations and dramatisations. There were no half-hour series or serials in 2007 but there were comedies in their stead. Clearly, the most significant difference – and the Radio Drama Department's major investment of the quarter – was the six-part dramatisation of Frederic Raphael's novel *Fame and Fortune*, the sequel to his 1976 novel *The Glittering Prizes*. This was a high-profile production and attracted more comment than was usual. By December 27 the serial had prompted 96 postings on Radio 4's Drama & Readings messageboard, the overwhelming majority hostile, although it has to be taken into account that incensed listeners are much more likely to comment than those who enjoy a production or are indifferent. The professional critics were likewise divided but tended to approve. Andrew Billen in the

New Statesman considered *Fame and Fortune* “a guilty, nostalgic treat”²⁷ as did Miranda Sawyer in *The Observer*: “Of course, the series is as Middle England as you can get ... but I don’t care. It was just so refreshing to have people talk like people rather than ciphers or bulletins.”²⁸ Robert Hanks in *The Independent*, on the other hand, disliked it intensely: “When I was an impressionable teenager, I thought the TV dramatisation of *The Glittering Prizes* was the last word in sophistication; the sequel, by contrast, strikes me as a parade of nasty-minded bores, spouting dialogue that consists entirely of underheated witticisms.”²⁹

Individual opinions do not carry much weight with a monopoly public service broadcast and in many ways nor should they. However the BBC has published statements of Programme Policy for 2007/2008 and the dramatisation of *Fame and Fortune* has to be considered in the context of the first of three stated priorities for Radio 4, which is to “Enhance the impact of drama output, including multi-part dramas based on contemporary and historical themes in the *Afternoon Play* and *Friday Play* slots.”³⁰ Under the heading “Stimulating creativity and cultural excellence” the statement elaborates: “We are a leading patron of the art of radio drama. We will broadcast plays by outstanding dramatists, as well as by many writers new to radio.” Raphael is by no means new to radio. Is he then an outstanding dramatist? Few would argue he is better known for his novels (and, though the BBC’s publicity material seemed to deliberately play down the fact, *Fame and Fortune* is, first and foremost, a novel^p) but he is certainly a distinguished screenwriter with many credits from *Darling* (1965) to *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). As an example of the art of radio drama it would be difficult to make any claims for *Fame and Fortune*. Self-evidently it is not a radio original and with its use of idiosyncratic narration (Raphael himself) and reliance on sophisticated dialogue it was reminiscent of radio drama of a much earlier period.

In one sense the production went against policy by appropriating half the quarter’s available allocation for outstanding radio writers. For six weeks there simply was no major original 60- or 90-minute production in the Saturday or Friday slot. The *Friday Play*, moreover, became simply a home for repeats rather than an opening for distinctive originals and innovative dramatisations. The reduction in slots for established writers

^p Published November 19 2007, no doubt to tie in with the dramatisation.

inevitably meant reduced opportunities for new writers, which is particularly ironic because the financial year 2006-7 ended with a spectacular example of what writers new to radio can achieve.

Ed Hime's *The Incomplete Recorded Works of a Dead Body* (*The Wire*, March 31 2007) went on to win the Prix Italia at Verona in late September, the first BBC original to do so in almost twenty years. Indeed, the BBC scored a rare double in 2007, with Peter Straughan's dramatisation of *Metropolis* winning the award for best adapted radio drama.³¹ But the BBC's expertise with ambitious dramatisations has never been in doubt whereas the Radio Dramatic Department has long lost its place at the forefront of dramatic experiment. As Robert Hanks of *The Independent* put it in a recent overview of the form:

Even in a slot that's supposedly dedicated to innovation, Radio 3's *The Wire*, the novelty tends to move along well-worn grooves: imaginary voices, layering of dialogue and music [...] subject matter that in almost any other medium would be taken for granted.³²

Hanks seemed unaware of Hime's play, which is understandable as the BBC did not publicise its achievement in any way. Hime, likewise, was unaware of the 'grooves' detailed by Hanks as he "had never heard a radio play before he started writing the piece."³³ Consequently, Hime did what Richard Hughes had done 83 years earlier: he conceived a drama entirely driven by sound. Specifically, Hime made a drama of *recorded* sound.

His protagonist, Babak Beyrouti, is an Iranian sound artist and, as the splendidly complex title suggests, he is dead. What the audience is hearing is ostensibly a memorial exhibition of Babak's final work – with context from other sources – jointly hosted by "The BBC in association with the Takei Gallery Tokyo."⁹ The assumption is that this is a normal programme ident but it turns out to be the voice of the narrator, Dale Malone, a friend of the artist. We hear a message left by Babak on Malone's answer machine, telling him that he is coming to London. Malone tells us he was out of

⁹ Although the BBC has been dilatory in publicising Hime's play, the script was available in pdf format from the Writersroom archive within a week of the Prix Italia ceremony.

⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/sight-script/archive.shtml> [Accessed October 5 2007]

the country and did not find the message until after Babak's death.³⁴ We are then presented with an acoustic "installation piece", which is pure New *Hörspiele*:

There are many overlapping recordings: the dripping of water into water on a massive scale, boots trudging through ice, yelping of seals. Malone's voice can occasionally be heard gibbering and murmuring, though it is not used very often.
[Hime 2007: 5]

This turns out to be the first collaboration between Malone and Babak, made in Greenland in 1999. And so the play continues, leading the listener in one direction and then turning the narrative on its head. The bulk of the play consists of Babak's journal – an audio journal, naturally – searching for the young woman, Simone, he first found playing the cello on a hotel roof in Beirut while the city was being bombarded by an Israeli gunboat. He follows Simone to London, where she is due to perform. But the woman who walks out onto the stage of the Dulwich Conservatoire is not the woman he met in Beirut. Babak stays on in London to try and unravel the mystery. His world gradually disintegrates in a maelstrom of recorded sound: he generates and receives phone messages; having filled up what he assumes is Simone's voicemail he takes to recording what he wants to say to her on a "little hidden lapel mic" as he strolls in Victoria Park. "There's people looking at me right now thinking I'm crazy and I'm talking to myself, but I'm not crazy cos I'm talking to you."³⁵

At the same time we hear recordings of police radio traffic. Babak has been mistaken for a known terrorist and there is a moment, as he reels out of the Conservatoire, when armed officers debate shooting him. The obvious parallel is with Jean Charles de Menezes, the Brazilian erroneously shot dead by Metropolitan police officers at Stockwell Tube station in 2005 – but this is barely halfway through the play and Hime is again playing with assumptions. The second half of the play documents – in sound – Babak's increasing isolation in a rundown council flat, his mental and physical deterioration, culminating in what is surely one of the most challenging sequences ever presented to a BBC sound effects team. In a five-page scene Babak records, on "4 180 degree Sony field mics suspended from the ceiling [with] a standard head clip mic to record my commentary",³⁶ performing major surgery on his own stomach. The dramatic

effect is pure radio, the same effect Scriven achieved in *A Single Taper*:[†] what we cannot see, we must imagine.

Perhaps the most encouraging fact about Ed Hime and his extraordinary play is that they came to radio through a mentoring scheme set up by the Royal Court theatre and BBC Writers' Room to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the English Stage Company.³⁷ Thus whilst major stage dramatists still resist writing original radio plays there has been one very significant outcome for radiogenic drama as a result of Mark Damazer's policy of more adaptations on Radio 4.[§]

17.6 Conclusions

Incomplete Recorded Works is exceptional but nevertheless demonstrates that BBC Radio Drama's commitment to new writing can yield spectacular results and, moreover, that there are writers of great promise who are both willing and able to create radiogenic drama. What is equally apparent is that there are currently insufficient opportunities for ambitious sound drama to attract and sustain a school of progressive writers who might go on to develop a new paradigm suited to the third age of radio and the demands of the media-literate consumer.

Perhaps the greatest indictment of BBC radio drama in the last two decades is that Tim Gebbels' criticism that "radio drama does not try nearly as hard as it could to attract listeners and that it consistently under-utilises the resources at its disposal"³⁸ and Jenny Abramsky's comment to the in-house drama festival, "I wonder if we are ambitious enough, frequently enough"³⁹ were made sixteen years apart.

Gebbels apportioned blame equally between writers and production staff:

...many radio plays seem to draw on a finite stock of scenarios and ideas. Marital difficulty, bereavement, self-discovery and recent redundancy are meat and drink to too many radio playwrights. Any resulting sense of *déjà vu* aroused in the listener is not alleviated by the fact that the BBC draws its casts mostly from a ready pool of actors working on contracts of between six and eighteen months. The same voices recur therefore in different roles which, combined with stilted

[†] See above, Chapter 8.

[§] See above, Chapter 14.

dialogue and unimaginative technical direction, can strain credibility and make generally for boring listening.⁴⁰

This is the same lack of artistic aspiration which Robert Hanks described in November 2007:

By comparison [with television] radio drama has lived a sheltered life. True, the recording process has gone all digital, and now that the BBC commissions independent production companies there is at least a semblance of competition. But there are few other spurs to change: Radio 3 and Radio 4 remain the only serious outlets; we don't get much chance to listen to ideas from elsewhere; there are too few people involved in radio drama to form a creative community, swapping ideas, urging one another on. Meanwhile, budgets have shrunk, and along with them the time that can be spent recording and editing.⁴¹

It is customary for critics to dismiss middlebrow drama but middlebrow drama is what maintains commercial theatre in London's West End and draws the substantive audience for radio drama. Ever since the BBC's founding principles were established radio drama has held a tripartite brief – to entertain, educate and to cultivate in the listener a taste for 'higher', more challenging fare. Thus in theory the audience drawn to Radio 4's generalist strands is encouraged to commit to a classic serial or an adaptation on Radio 3, some of which will be more challenging than others, and among listeners to the more challenging adaptations there will be a minority prepared to embrace the experimentalism of *The Wire*. This was the reasoning behind the postwar reorganisation that resulted in the era of British radio drama's greatest diversity but which, for drama, had shrunk to distinctive slots rather than channels by 1991 when Peter M Lewis wrote:

These different 'theatres of the air' have been running for a quarter of a century. Over time their repertoires have been transformed by a steady liberal osmosis and sometimes by deliberate intervention, but their differential relationship with each other, the socio-cultural universe they describe, has been preserved. Thus are the imaginations organised, not only of listeners and intending writers, but of the producers themselves.⁴²

Lewis made his comments whilst the "demanding"⁴³ *Monday Play* was still part of mainstream programming on Radio 4. He notes, however, that the Monday evening drama was to an extent muzzled by the cost imperative of a Saturday afternoon repeat.¹ Lewis, who had observed the Drama Department in operation in the late 1980s,

¹ He cites the example of *Excess Baggage* (1988) by Ken Blakeson, which was denied a repeat because it contained 'strong' language. [Scannell 1991: 17]

identified “a policy tension ... between satisfying an audience that has grown to understand and appreciate the existing slots, and developing a ‘fringe theatre’ which satisfies the desire of writers to challenge the frontiers of convention as represented by those same slots.”⁴⁴

Properly maintained, this tension can be a positive factor. Any national, publicly funded broadcaster has to combine the roles of popular entertainer and cultural impresario. Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell made specific reference to the issue of duality when publishing the White Paper in March 2006:

I want to see the BBC continue to take fun seriously, ensuring that quality entertainment is engrained into its services wherever possible, while not chasing ratings but providing something new, innovative and distinctly BBC.⁴⁵

The concept of a product “distinctly BBC” does not fully describe the situation with British radio drama which is uniquely BBC. Moreover, with subsidy for regional and touring theatre companies in decline and no outlet for original single plays on television, BBC radio is the principal platform for new dramatic writing in Britain today. As discussed in Chapter 14, the Radio Drama Department’s commitment to new writers is exemplary; however the vast majority of first-time writers are accommodated in the *Afternoon Play* slot which, as the brief descriptions in Appendix 8 demonstrate, remains overwhelmingly what Gebbels described in 1991: bereavement, divorce, and generally ‘starting over’. With the prestigious Saturday afternoon and Friday evening slots increasingly being given over to adaptations and dramatisations the necessary tension between middle-of-the-road and state-of-the-art is threatened. Whilst it is true that some of the *Drama on 3* productions listed in Appendix 8 are original radio plays not so easily categorised – and whilst it is not disputed that they are all well-written and produced – how many are truly radiogenic? How many could not be done, should the opportunity arise, in another dramatic form?

Perhaps the single most important conclusion to be drawn from this study is that radio drama is not, as Gielgud always argued, a “Cinderella medium” inferior to the stage and cinema and fated to be subsumed by television but, at its highest, a distinct dramatic art form which can accommodate certain themes and subjects – most notably the life of the mind – more effectively than any other.

Truly radiogenic plays have always been rare. Even in the first, pre-Gielgud “experimental period” Sieveking’s two “rhythms” and Guthrie’s microphone soliloquies were far outnumbered by works like *Speed* and *Pursuit* which used the Dramatic Control Panel to produce cinematic thrillers. In the great era of drama on radio – which is not entirely the same as the era of great radio drama – the most prestigious productions were the high literature of MacNeice, Reed and Thomas, which were certainly radiophonic in that they used the vocabulary of radio drama (the ability to switch scene instantly, to slide from external action to interior reflection, to inhabit an uncertain reality) to achieve their effects but were not always radiogenic in the sense that *A Slight Ache* and Beckett’s radio plays from *Embers* onward were radiogenic. Pinter and Beckett realised, as the very best radio writers have always known, that a radiogenic play supplies the parameters within which the listener creates the drama in his or her personal theatre of the imagination – in brief, that radio drama is a participatory form. Martin Esslin, Head of BBC Radio Drama immediately after the period of Pinter and Beckett, describes the collaboration between writer and listener:

...far from being a blind medium, radio ... is an intensely visual medium. The nature of man’s consciousness and sensory apparatus is predominantly visual, and inevitably compels him to think and imagine in visual images. Information that reaches him through other senses is instantly converted into visual terms. And aural experiences, which include the immense richness of language as well as musical and natural sound, are the most effective means of triggering visual images. These images, moreover, being generated by each individual listener, have the advantage of being completely satisfying to him. There is no danger that the image seen will fall short of what he may have expected – as it often does in the theatre or on the screen. [Esslin 1983: 131-132]

There is no need to delve into the archive to find an example of Esslin’s argument in practice. Take the scene, described briefly above, in which Hime’s sound artist meets the woman who turns out not to be the cellist Simone Rouff playing on the roof of a hotel in besieged Bierut. It is a very short scene, barely a page and a half, and the dialogue (as opposed to the soundscape and Babak’s narration) is strictly functional – a simple exchange of names – and yet it is the crucial, inciting incident of the drama. On stage, artifice is implicit; on television it would either be rewritten or ‘got around’ by having the bombardment ‘off camera’; in cinema it might be filmed at the specific location, which would be incredibly indulgent, but more likely would be recreated in

Eastern Europe with appropriate effects. On radio, on the other hand, it is summoned into existence by sound effects and an oblique reference from Babak two scenes earlier. In our heads it is as real as it needs to be.

Esslin is describing a form very close to what Arnheim postulated in 1936.^u As a young man in Vienna in the 1930s Esslin would have been familiar with Arnheim's work and with the early *hörspiele* that informed it. From the outset radio drama in Germany enjoyed a cultural prestige which has never been the case in Britain. Critical and scholarly attention drew the most significant writers to radio; the best writers attracted substantial fees, which required broadcasters to maximise the returns from their investment – primarily by rebroadcasting the material in various ways – and this in turn generated much greater rewards for radio writers in general. In Germany radio drama became a profession rather than a sideline or apprenticeship. The German broadcasting system is discussed in detail in Chapter 15 but two key aspects – the genuine regional system and the extensive use of archive – are worth considering here as possible ways forward for BBC radio drama in straitened times.

Gielgud's animosity to the regions, discussed in Chapter 6, seems hopelessly outdated to 21st century sensibilities – yet for radio drama the corporate practice of the BBC in 2007 is more metrocentric than ever before. Alison Hindell described the absurd situation whereby BBC Scotland records much of its radio drama output in London.^v Not only does this work against the BBC's public purpose of "representing the UK's nations, regions and communities" but it also stifles "creativity and cultural excellence" by limiting access for writers and performers. However, the argument for true regionalism should not be financial or geographic but artistic – the cultivation of distinctive schools of practice. The example which proves the point is Manchester under Harding in the 1930s which continued the work of the Programme Research Department by developing the dramatic feature (which incidentally brought the voice of the working class to the BBC for the first time) and, through Bridson, creating the unique radio drama form subsequently exported around the world. In every Commonwealth country (with the notable exception of Canada) indigenous radio drama

^u But not what McWhinnie discusses in 1959, which is strictly radiophonic.

^v See above, Chapter 14.

began with a Bridson feature; serious original American radio drama began with a play whose author cited *The March of the '45* as his model.

The March of the '45 is probably the earliest drama recording extant in the sound archive and, as discussed in Chapter 16, remains eminently playable today. Other recordings considered in that chapter might need aesthetic enhancement before a modern audience would find them acceptable. The point remains, there is an enormous trove of recorded drama – work recorded for posterity as well as dissemination in other countries – awaiting rediscovery, effective cataloguing, academic study and practical exploitation. Proactive use of the archive would mitigate the “ghastly impermanence of the medium”⁴⁶ which has proved a disincentive to established writers and an obstacle to critical and academic appraisal.^w Greg Dyke announced plans for free online public access to the BBC Creative Archive as long ago as August 2003, describing the move as the natural “second phase” use of digital technology, contributing to the Corporation’s “public value” remit.⁴⁷ It was another four years before the service was trialled⁴⁸ – to a BBC-selected sample of 20,000 – and no results have yet been made public. Any technical problems have long been resolved, thus one suspects the difficulties are contractual. The aim was always to address intellectual property rights through the Creative Commons protocols developed in America to regularise what has become common internet practice (for example, sampling and remixing music), however the protocols make clear it is for the rights holder to determine which should be reserved.^x As mentioned above, a precedent has been set for paying writers a nominal fee for downloaded material; the fee would be higher for original material, naturally, but there is no reason the BBC could not charge the consumer through Worldwide as it does for its existing range of audio books. Perhaps something similar to the LA Theatre Works practice might be the solution: broadcast the archive recording, make it freely available for download on the main website for seven days and thereafter charge a price sufficient to cover costs. The cost of publishing original audio drama in traditional ‘hard’ formats for sale through traditional retail outlets has been prohibitive given the generally limited demand, whereas the cost of making it available online is virtually nil – save, perhaps,

^w Lewis [2000: 164], writing of radio in general, envisages a potential rebalancing effect: “the lack of accessible or published material from the archives contributes to a distorted view of radio history: a folk memory of a Golden Age devalues contemporary work.”

^x See <http://creativecommons.org>.

for royalties. There is, of course, a body of archive material for which royalties were never paid, that written by BBC employees like Bridson.

The value of the archive, however, is not commercial but cultural. Radio was the first true mass medium, radio drama the first dramatic form to enter the home. As has been demonstrated in preceding chapters, radio drama was integral to the popular experience of key stages in the development of contemporary British culture, notably World War II and the era of social mobility that followed – yet while newspapers celebrate their heritage and increasingly make their archives available online, eighty years of BBC sound drama remains largely unheard. What Mark Damazer called “the ‘golden age’ of [stage] play writing of the last 40 or 50 years”⁴⁹ was, as demonstrated in Chapter 12, built upon foundations laid on the Third Programme; yet to celebrate significant anniversaries the BBC revives dramatists’ stage plays rather than their radio work. Perhaps the most striking example of this during the period under consideration in Chapter 14 was the revival of Tom Stoppard’s minor stage play *The Real Thing* (1982)^y to mark the beginning of the author’s seventieth year rather than his major radio play *Artist Descending a Staircase* (1972). This tendency is evidence that one of Gielgud’s axioms still holds sway at the BBC, the unshakeable belief that stage plays are almost always better and invariably more prestigious than radio drama. In 2007, to a far greater extent than in 1929, theatre is an elitist and largely metropolitan art form with minimal opportunities for new writing. Even in the multimedia age more people listen to any radio play on any day of the week than see the most lauded new stage play in the entirety of its run. Whilst that does not make the radio play superior, it equally cannot be automatically dismissed as ephemeral. There is one British radio play that everyone knows – *Under Milk Wood* – and probably a hundred or so that are inarguably works of the highest quality that should join Thomas’s Play for Voices in a repertoire that is regularly revisited.

Similarly, it makes no sense, either artistically, culturally or financially, that BBC audiences are never offered radio drama from other countries, whether as a rebroadcast or a new production in translation. It is frankly absurd that the *WorldPlay* entries, including the World Service production which the British taxpayer rather than licence

^y *Saturday Play*, December 31 2006.

fee holder has funded, are not given airtime on Radio 3 or 4 or even webcast. To do so would not only enlarge the creative community of radio drama and diversify both voices and subject matter, it would also serve as a reminder that serious original single plays for radio are as plentiful around the world in 2007 as they have ever been. Indeed, many parts of the world are producing them for the first time. Take for example, Croatia, which only regained its national identity in June 1991. By 1999 Croatian Radio was producing “on average about 150 radio dramas a year.”⁵⁰ The examples collected by Ivankovic and Maticic indicate a range similar to that of the Third Programme in the early 1950s. Mislav Brumec’s *Francesca da Rimini* (1996) is strongly reminiscent of Henry Reed’s *Leopardi* (1949-1950) whereas Katka Simunic’s *Blueblanche, Tango, War* (1992) is stylistically on the cusp between second period *Hörspiele* and New *Hörspiele*. It may well be that these similarities are not accidental; it seems logical that artists exploring what for them is a new form would familiarise themselves with the best work done elsewhere. It is therefore surely worth an experiment, backed with specific qualitative research, to discover if British listeners have a taste for the best of the rest of the world’s radio drama output.

Finally, the universality of radio in the age of convergence offers an opportunity, in certain cases, for sound drama to break free of the oldest of all its tenets: Kolin Hager’s 1922 assumption, subsequently endorsed by Gielgud and today enshrined in the BBC’s *Afternoon Play*, that the listener can only cope with forty to forty-minute’s worth of drama – what on stage would be a one-act play. Portability and time-shift listening mean that, as with digital TV, ‘live’ consumption of radio drama can now be paused, deferred or revisited as the circumstances or preferences of the user require. It may be that this is the level of interactivity the listener wants in relation to radio drama rather than that offered by *The Wheel of Fortune* or *The Dark House*.² Exploiting the technology certainly means that plays that need to can escape the rigidity of Lewis’s “theatres of the air” and therein might lie the seeds of drama for the third age of radio.

This study set out with three aims: to construct a critical, contextual history of the development of radio drama, predominantly in Britain; to give due weight to the Northern regional model of the dramatic feature and its contribution to postwar radio

² See Chapter 13.

drama in Britain, to British theatre in the 1950s, and to world sound drama in general; and, thirdly, to consider the most radiogenic examples as literature.

What has become clear during the study is that there is an ongoing tension between narrative drama with, in the broadest sense, theatrical conventions, and a looser, less linear form making full use of radio's uniquely blank canvas. Narrative plays inevitably outnumber non-narrative – they are easier to write and to consume, neither of which necessarily detracts from their merit – but it is the radiogenic minority that characterise true radio drama. Through the various case studies it has been possible to identify some key signatures of the radiogenic play: scope, which can range from panoramic to miniscule; internalisation of the drama or the psyche as protagonist; the ability to sustain the fantastical; glossolalia or alternatively the use of non-verbal sound as a driver of drama. “Because of the absence of the visual image,” Angela Carter argued, “radio drama need not necessarily be confined to the representation of things as they are.”⁵¹ Certain genres are particularly suited to radiogenic themes – for example, the modern morality and what has been defined here as English Everyday Absurd – but none are excluded; it would be fascinating, for example, to construct a radiogenic *noir* thriller.

Radio drama makes two distinct contributions to modern British literature, both of them radiogenic. On the one hand there is the High Literature of the radio poets, Bridson, Reed, Thomas and MacNeice; on the other the psychodramas of the theatrical heavyweights, Guthrie, Beckett, Pinter and Stoppard. The contribution is neither negligible nor incidental; there was nothing remotely like *Matrimonial News* on the British stage in 1930 and Reed's radio plays in the early 1950s prepared the theatrical mainstream for the European New Wave that included Beckett. In other countries, most notably in Germany, radiogenic drama has always been recognised as a distinct and culturally important art form. Its neglect in Britain is partly the legacy of Gielgud, partly the thirty year preoccupation of the BBC with internal processes rather than cultural contribution. Now that the BBC has been given a defined cultural ‘purpose’ it is hoped the situation will change.

Where theatre is the actor's medium, film the director's medium and television the medium for the storyteller, radio drama is the writer's medium – to quote Carter again,

“It is a medium that writers like.”⁵² They like radio because there are few constraints and a minimal number of filters between their imagination and the listener’s. The financial rewards in Britain are not huge (again, unlike Germany) but they are adequate and, now that the BBC Writers Room has reinvigorated the open door policy, they are accessible, which is not always the case in other countries with a radio drama tradition. The BBC has been the principal patron of classical music in Britain since the Company was founded in 1922; the same can only really be said of drama after Gielgud’s loss of authority in 1950 but since then virtually every British playwright, script- or screenwriter of significance has received early patronage from the Drama Department. That, in short, is where BBC radio drama has made an immeasurable cultural contribution for more than half a century and why it remains an indispensable cultural asset in 2007.

This study began with a quotation from Gillian Reynolds. It seems fitting that it should end with another:

No other broadcaster does as many plays as Radio 4. Not all of them are brilliant, but not all of them can be. To get cream you need a lot of milk. It’s expensive but worth it. The best doesn’t come on its own. Radio 4’s audience expects lots of plays, whether comedies, classic serials, murder mysteries, big-issue dramas and, that microcosm of every genre, *The Archers*.

But the whole of the creative industry depends heavily on BBC, and particularly Radio 4, patronage. Actors, writers, composers, adaptors, experimenters, poets can all make a living, if not a fortune, from their work on Radio 4, where writing is taken seriously and talent can be nursed.⁵³

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Appendix 1: Broadcast plays 1932

“The following were the most important plays broadcast during the past year---”^a

The BBC Year Book 1933 (170).

Microphone plays

Love One Another – L du Garde Peach

Nor 'west – L du Garde Peach

Bread – L du Garde Peach

Goodnight, Vienna – Holt Marvell & George Posford

Friday Morning – Val Gielgud

Ann and Harold – Louis Goodrich

Oranges and Lemons – Philip Wade

Flags on the Matterhorn – Gasbarra and Pfiel

Midsummer Eve – John Drinkwater

The Sea in a Shell – Lance Sieveking

The Little Ass – Bernard Walke

All Souls' Eve – Bernard Walke

Adapted stage plays

Julius Caesar – Shakespeare

The Taming of the Shrew – Shakespeare

Othello – Shakespeare

Henry V – Shakespeare

Hamlet – Shakespeare

There are Crimes and Crimes – Strindberg

B J One – S King Hall

Rope – Patrick Hamilton

A Hundred Years Old – Quintero

Dr Faustus – Marlowe

The Round Table – Lennox Robinson

The White Blackbird – Lennox Robinson

An Ideal Husband – Oscar Wilde

Dramatised novels

Jane Eyre – Charlotte Bronte

Eric, or Little by Little – Dean Farrar

To Any Husband – A E Coppard

The Turn of the Screw – Henry James

Markheim – R L Stevenson

The Triumph of Youth – Jacob Wasserman

^a Specifically, November 1 1931 to October 31 1932.

Appendix 2: Drama Reports Scheme questionnaire 1937

TITLE/TIME OF BROADCAST/DATE OF BROADCAST (pre-printed)

Did you enjoy this broadcast? YES/NO

Briefly, what did you think of it?

What did you think of its length? TOO LONG/JUST RIGHT/TOO SHORT

Did you follow the story without difficulty? YES/NO

If not, where did you find it confusing?

**Were the voices of the principal characters
sufficiently well contrasted to enable you to
identify them immediately? YES/NO**

If not, with which characters did confusion arise?

**a) Did you think the performance of any character
was outstandingly good? YES/NO**
If so, which?

**b) Did you think the performance of any character
was poor? YES/NO**
If so, which?

**Did you think any of the sound effects were
unconvincing? YES/NO**
If so, which?

**If you had not been a member of the drama panel
Would you have turned in to this broadcast at all? YES/NO**
If so, would you have switched off before the end? YES/NO

Name

Date

Address

Appendix 3: Origin of cited *Saturday Night Theatre* plays 1945

“*Saturday Night Theatre* has continued regularly to attract a large audience. *Love on the Dole*, *Dear Octopus*, and *The Unguarded Hour* head, in popularity, a list which has also included plays so diverse as *Young Woodley*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Silver King*, *Loyalties*, *The Good Companions*, *Outward Bound*, *Quinneys*, *Quality Street*, *I lived with You*, and *The First Mrs Fraser*.”

“More Radio Drama in 1945”. *BBC Year Book 1946*: 63-64

<i>Love on the Dole</i>	Ronald Gow & Walter Greenwood	Stage adaptation of novel	1935
<i>Dear Octopus</i>	Dodie Smith	Stage Play	1938
<i>The Unguarded Hour</i>	Bernard Merivale	Stage Play	1935
<i>Young Woodley</i>	John van Druten	Stage Play	1925
<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	Jane Austen	Novel	1813
<i>The Silver King</i>	Henry Arthur Jones & Henry Herman	Stage Play	1882
<i>Loyalties</i>	John Galsworthy	Stage Play	1922
<i>The Good Companions</i>	J B Priestley	Stage adaptation of novel	1931
<i>Outward Bound</i>	Sutton Vane	Stage Play	1923
<i>Quinneys</i>	Horace Annesley Vachell	Stage Play	1915
<i>Quality Street</i>	J M Barrie	Stage Play	1902
<i>I lived with You</i>	Ivor Novello	Stage Play	1932
<i>The First Mrs Fraser</i>	St John Ervine	Stage Play	1923

Appendix 4: The growth of drama programming 1944-47

1. Wartime schedule May 14 – May 20 1944

Sunday May 14		Home Service
5.20-6.30	<i>Children's Hour: David Copperfield</i> , dramatised by Philip Wade and John Benson, produced by Derek McCulloch, 5/15	
9.30-10.05	<i>The Adventures of Don Quixote</i> , dramatised by Eric Linklater, produced by John Burrell, 3/7	BBC recording

Monday May 15		Home Service
6.30-6.55	<i>The Lost World</i> (Conan Doyle), dramatised by Peggy Wells, produced by Martin C Webster, 4/?	

Wednesday May 17		Home Service
4.30-5.00	<i>Wednesday Matinee: The House on the Green</i> by Mabel Constanduros and Howard Agg, produced by Hugh Stewart	
7.15-8.00	<i>The King of Lampedusa</i> , Yiddish fantastic comedy by S J Charendorf, adapted and produced by Max Kester	

Thursday May 18		Home Service
9.40-10.10	<i>Appointment With Fear: (6) The Clock Strikes Eight</i> , written by John Dickson Carr, produced by Martyn C Webster	

Saturday May 20		Home Service
9.20-10.30	<i>Saturday Night Theatre: The Emperor Jones</i> (Eugene O'Neill), adapted and produced by Peter Creswell	

2. Drama schedule May 11 – May 17 1947

Sunday May 11		Home Service	
4.15-5.00	<i>Many Parts</i> by Ronald Parr, produced by John Richmond		
5.00-5.55	<i>Children's Hour</i> including <i>The Secret Garden</i> (Burnett), dramatised by Olive Dehn, produced by Derek McCulloch, 2/3 "I am Colin"		
8.30-9.00	<i>Vanity Fair</i> (Thackeray), dramatised by Audrey Lucas, produced by Martyn C Webster, 2/12		BBC recording
Light Programme			
9.30-10.00	<i>Paul Temple and Steve</i> by Francis Durbridge, produced by Martyn C Webster, 7/8 "The Suspects"		
Third Programme			
8.00-9.30	<i>Richard II</i> (Old Vic production starring Alec Guinness)		
10.00-11.00			

Monday May 12		Home Service
5.00-5.25	<i>Children's Hour: The House at Pooh Corner</i> (Milne), dramatised by W E Davis, producer not named	
9.15-10.45	<i>World Theatre: A Doll's House</i> (Ibsen), adapted and produced by Howard Rose	
Light Programme		
4.00-4.15	<i>The Robinsons</i> , written by Lesley Wilson, produced by Archie Campbell	BBC recording
4.15-5.40	<i>Quiet Wedding</i> , comedy by Esther McCracken, adapted by Mollie Greenhalgh, produced by Hugh Stewart	Recording of <i>Saturday Night Theatre</i> 10.5.47
6.45-7.00	<i>Dick Barton – Special Agent</i> , written by Geoffrey Webb, produced by Martyn C Webster	BBC recording
8.15-8.45	<i>Ashenden</i> (Maugham), dramatised by Mary Hope Allen, produced by Neil Tuson, 3/6 "Guilia Lazzari"	
Third Programme		
9.10-10.10	<i>Dreams</i> (dramatic feature?), written by Kenneth Alexander, produced by Nesta Pain	Recording of 24.3.47

Tuesday May 13		Light Programme
4.00-4.15	<i>The Robinsons</i> , written by Lesley Wilson, produced by Archie Campbell	BBC recording
6.45-7.00	<i>Dick Barton – Special Agent</i> , written by Geoffrey Webb, produced by Martyn C Webster	BBC recording
9.30-10.00	<i>Mystery Playhouse: The Haunted Inn</i> (no details)	

Wednesday May 14		Home Service
4.00-4.40	<i>Wednesday Matinee (I): Cul de Sac</i> , written by Aileen Burke and Leone Stewart, produced by Hugh Stewart	
4.40-5.00	<i>Wednesday Matinee (II): The Old and the New</i> , written by Michael Brett, produced by Hugh Stewart	
6.20-6.45	<i>Maddon's Rock</i> , written by Hammond Innes, produced by David H Godfrey, 8/8	
Light Programme		
4.00-4.15	<i>The Robinsons</i> , written by Lesley Wilson, produced by Archie Campbell	BBC recording
6.45-7.00	<i>Dick Barton – Special Agent</i> , written by Geoffrey Webb, produced by Martyn C Webster	BBC recording
9.15-10.00	<i>Theatre Programme</i> includes scenes from <i>The Eagle Has Two Heads</i> by Jean Cocteau, Globe Theatre production adapted by Ronald Duncan	
Third Programme		
7.00-9.00	<i>The Flies</i> (Jean-Paul Sartre), adapted and produced by E J King Bull	

Thursday May 15		Home Service
3.45-4.15	<i>Vanity Fair</i> (Thackeray), dramatised by Audrey Lucas, produced by Martyn C Webster, 2/12	Repeat of Sunday

5.00-5.55	<i>Children's Hour</i> including <i>Mystery at Castle Park Zoo</i> (Jean Marsh), dramatised by Olivia Manning, produced by Margaret Bacon, 3/6	
Light Programme		
4.00-4.15	<i>The Robinsons</i> , written by Lesley Wilson, produced by Archie Campbell	BBC recording
6.45-7.00	<i>Dick Barton – Special Agent</i> , written by Geoffrey Webb, produced by Martyn C Webster	BBC recording
Third Programme		
6.30-8.00	<i>Deirdre of the Sorrows</i> (J M Synge), produced by Noel Iliff	Recording of <i>World Theatre</i> 14.4.47
Regional (West)		
7.20-7.50	<i>The Point of View/The Carrier Pigeon</i> , two plays by Eden Phillpotts	
Regional (North)		
10.00-10.30	<i>The Petrified Dream</i> , written by J Coleman Milton <i>The Peacock City of the P'Tzan King</i> , story in verse by R C Scriven	

Friday May 16		Home Service
4.35-5.00	<i>Maddon's Rock</i> , written by Hammond Innes, produced by David H Godfrey, 8/8	Repeat of Wednesday
5.00-5.55	<i>Children's Hour: Prince Prigio</i> (Andrew Lang), dramatised by Muriel Levy, produced by Nan Macdonald	
Light Programme		
4.00-4.15	<i>The Robinsons</i> , written by Lesley Wilson, produced by Archie Campbell	BBC recording
6.45-7.00	<i>Dick Barton – Special Agent</i> , written by Geoffrey Webb, produced by Martyn C Webster	BBC recording
Third Programme		
9.00-11.00	<i>The Flies</i> (Jean-Paul Sartre), adapted and produced by E J King Bull	BBC recording

Saturday May 17		Home Service	
2.15-3.00	<i>Saturday Matinee: Sound Channel</i> , written by Charles Terrot, produced by David H Godfrey		
9.20-10.45	<i>Saturday Night Theatre: Gallows Glorious</i> , written by Ronald Gow, produced by Peter Watts		
Light Programme			
11.00-12.00	<i>Dick Barton – Special Agent</i> omnibus		BBC recording
2.00-2.30	<i>Mystery Playhouse: The Haunted Inn</i>		Repeat of Tuesday
6.45-7.00	<i>Dick Barton – Special Agent</i> , written by Geoffrey Webb, produced by Martyn C Webster		BBC recording
Third Programme			
6.00-6.45	<i>Savonarola Brown</i> (Max Beerbohm), dramatic feature by John Cheatle, produced by Felix Felton		Recording of 6.11.1946
9.00-10.15	<i>Eothen, or Traces of Travel brought home from the East</i> (A W Kinglake), dramatised and produced by Robert Gittings		Recording of 3.3.47

Appendix 5: Range of plays October-December 1954^a

a) Plays on the Light Programme, 4th Quarter 1954

Wk		Sunday	Wed/ <i>Curtain Up</i>
Season of new thrillers			
40	Sep 26		From Information Received Leslie Harcourt
41	Oct 3		Lover, Come Back Lester Powell
42	Oct 10		<i>The Brothers</i> , Rex Rienits
43	Oct 17		<i>Heatwave</i> , Elleston Trevor
44	Oct 24		The Business at Blanche Capel Max Kester (dramatisation)
Somerset Maugham Festival			
45	Oct 31	<i>The Back of Beyond</i>	<i>Lady Frederick</i>
46	Nov 7	<i>The Three Fat Women of Antibes</i>	<i>The Circle</i>
47	Nov 14	<i>The Vessel of Wrath</i>	<i>For Services Rendered</i>
48	Nov 21	<i>The Lotus Eaters</i>	<i>Sheppey</i>
49	Nov 28	<i>The Voice of the Turtle</i>	<i>The Moon and Sixpence</i>
		Radio Theatre	The Stars in Their Choices
50	Dec 5	The Sound of Cymbals Giles Cooper	Trevor Howard in <i>The Devil's General</i> , Zuckmayer (2hrs, pre-recorded)
51	Dec 12	Like Men Betrayed John Mortimer	Yvonne Arnaud in <i>The Nutmeg Tree</i> , Margery Sharp
52	Dec 19	One Night in Styria David Howarth, dram. Cooper	Michael Denison & Dulcie Gray in <i>Blithe Spirit</i> , Noël Coward
53	Dec 26	Edward and Caroline Becker, dram. Derek Hart	Gladys Cooper in <i>The Second Mrs Tanqueray</i> , Arthur Wing Pinero ^b

^a WAC R19/279/4 Entertainment/Drama Memos, File 4 1953-1954

^b The original memo wrongly credits the play to "Lonsdale".

b) Plays on the Third Programme, 4th Quarter 1954

40	Sep 26	<i>The Poplar</i> , Padraic Fallon <i>Liberty Comes to Kräwinkel</i> , Johann Nestroy	2 perfs 3 rd broadcast
41	Oct 3	<i>Iphegenia in Tauris</i> , Goethe, trans Roy Pascal <i>La Cour des Miracles</i> , Jean Prieur	2 perfs 3 rd broadcast
42	Oct 10	<i>Ivanov</i> , Chekhov (rec rpt 21.2.54) <i>A Poor Gentleman</i> , Turgenev <i>Leocadia</i> , Jean Anhouil	4 th broadcast 4 th broadcast 3 rd broadcast
43	Oct 17	<i>The Queen and the Rebels</i> , Ugo Betti, trans Reed <i>Peter Ibbetson</i> , George du Maurier	2 perfs 3 rd broadcast
44	Oct 24	<i>Belshazzar's Feast</i> , Calderon, adapt. Helena Wood <i>All's Well That Ends Well</i> , Shakespeare	2 perfs 3 rd broadcast
45	Oct 31	<i>The Pension Beaurepas</i> , Henry James <i>La Verité est Morte</i> , Emanuel Robles	2 perfs 3 rd broadcast
46	Nov 7	<i>Bolivar</i> , Supervielle trans Gerard Hopkins <i>The Poplar</i> , Padraic Fallon	2 perfs 3 rd broadcast
47	Nov 14	<i>To Damascus</i> Parts 1, 2 & 3, Strindberg	2 nd broadcast
48	Nov 21	<i>Marching Song</i> , John Whiting <i>Iphegenia in Tauris</i> , Goethe, trans Roy Pascal	2 perfs 3 rd broadcast
49	Nov 28	<i>Sud</i> , Julien Green <i>The Pension Beaurepas</i> , Henry James	2 perfs 3 rd broadcast
50	Dec 5	<i>The Mystery of Robert the Devil</i> , trans W S Merwin <i>The Queen and the Rebels</i> , Ugo Betti, trans Reed	2 perfs 3 rd broadcast
51	Dec 12	<i>Ion</i> , Euripides <i>Bolivar</i> , Supervielle trans Gerard Hopkins	2 perfs 3 rd broadcast
52	Dec 19	<i>The Confidential Clerk</i> , T S Eliot	2 perfs
53	Dec 26	<i>A Phoenix Too Frequent</i> , Christopher Fry <i>Sud</i> , Julien Green	2 perfs 3 rd broadcast

c) Plays on the Home Service, 4th Quarter 1954^c

Wk		Monday Night Play	Thurs Repeat	Saturday Night Theatre
40	Sep 26	<i>The Secret Man</i> Calder Marshall	<i>Witch Hunt</i> ^d	<i>A Question of Fact</i> Wynard Browne
41	Oct 3	<i>Justice Fielding</i> Roy Walker	<i>Oblomov</i> ^e	<i>The Bamboo House</i> George Scurfield
42	Oct 10	World Theatre: <i>Romeo & Juliet</i> (rec. rpt from Light Programme)	<i>The Bamboo House</i>	<i>An Ideal Husband</i> Oscar Wilde
43	Oct 17	<i>The Tsaricides</i> George Wickham ^f	<i>The Secret Man</i>	<i>The New Gossoon</i> George Shiels
44	Oct 24	<i>Kosumo</i> Robert Nichols	<i>Lisel</i> ^g	<i>Mr Mysterious</i> Elleston Trevor
45	Oct 31	<i>The English Captain</i> Lydia Ragosin	<i>Mr Mysterious</i>	<i>The Wooden Dish</i> Edmund Morris
46	Nov 7	<i>Winter Journey</i> Clifford Odets	<i>A Question of Fact</i>	<i>Fear to Tread</i> Gilbert/C E Webber
47	Nov 14	World Theatre: <i>Antigone</i>	<i>Fear to Tread</i>	<i>Clive of India</i> Lipscomb & Minnery
48	Nov 21	<i>The Player King</i> Christopher Hassall	<i>An Ideal Husband</i>	<i>Sounding Brass</i> James R Gregson
49	Nov 28	<i>The Goodly Seed</i> Wyllie dram. Green	<i>The English Captain</i>	<i>The Old Reliable</i> Wodehouse/Felton
50	Dec 5	<i>Sheba</i> Bridget Boland	<i>The Player King</i>	<i>Brat Farrar</i> Tey dram. Wentzel
51	Dec 12	<i>Witch Wood</i> Buchan	<i>Brat Farrar</i>	<i>A Knight on Wheels</i> Hay dram. Stafford Byrne
52	Dec 19	<i>Swanwhite</i> Strindberg	<i>The Old Reliable</i>	<i>The Silver King</i> Arthur Jones
53	Dec 26	<i>The Holly and the Ivy</i> Wynard Browne	<i>The Goodly Seed</i>	<i>Late Love</i> Rosemary Casey

^c McWhinnie's handwritten lists in the WAC file are only 'offers', although the Thursday repeats are linked to dates and seem to indicate the date of the original broadcasts. The table has therefore been checked against the 'Broadcasting' column of *The Times* for the various days.

^d *Saturday Night Theatre* wk 39, by Rex Rienits

^e *Monday Night Play* wk 39

^f Originally proposed as *Come Freedom*

^g *Monday Night Play* wk 38 (in the event replaced by racing from Newbury)

d) Drama (plays and serials) in Week 47 1954

	Home Service	Light Programme	Third Programme
Sunday November 14	Classic Serial <i>St Ives</i> R L Stevenson 30 min	Somerset Maugham Season <i>The Vessel of Wrath</i> 30 min	<i>Emily Butter</i> Reed/Swann 75 min
		<i>A Life of Bliss</i> Ep XI 30 min	<i>To Damascus I</i> 120 min
		<i>Journey into Space</i> Ep X 30 min	
Monday November 15	World Theatre <i>Antigone</i> 80 min	<i>Mrs Dale</i> 15 min	
		<i>The Archers</i> 15 min	
		<i>Journey into Space</i> Ep XI 30 min	
Tuesday November 16		<i>Mrs Dale</i> 15 min	<i>To Damascus II</i> 90 min
		<i>The Archers</i> 15 min	
		<i>Adventures of Sherlock Holmes</i> 30 min	
Wednesday November 17	<i>Carol and the Sunday-Man</i> Enid Hollins 60 min	<i>A Life of Bliss</i> Ep XII 30 min	<i>Emily Butter</i> Reed/Swann 75 min (R)
		<i>Mrs Dale</i> 15 min	
		<i>The Archers</i> 15 min	
		Somerset Maugham Season <i>For Services Rendered</i> 95min	
Thursday November 18	<i>Fear to Tread</i> 90 min (R)	<i>Mrs Dale</i> 15 min	
		<i>The Archers</i> 15 min	
Friday November 19	Classic Serial <i>St Ives</i> R L Stevenson 30 min (R)	<i>Mrs Dale</i> 15 min	<i>James Joyce's Ulysses: Two scenes from the novel</i> 100 min
		<i>The Archers</i> 15 min	
Saturday November 20	<i>Model Wives</i> David Waller 35 min	<i>The Archers</i> 30 min	<i>To Damascus III</i> 120 min
	Saturday Night Theatre <i>Clive of India</i> 90 min		

Appendix 6: Gielgud's memo to Haley, October 11 1950^a

Subject: DRAMA AND POLITICAL PLAYS

The fundamental connection between drama and politics is I think almost as close as that between drama and religion. Just as the Greek tragedy stemmed from myth and religious rite, so Greek comedy, exemplified at its finest flowering by Aristophanes, stemmed from man the political animal and took the form of extremely pungent contemporary political satire. The parents of the Elizabethan drama were surely the religious miracle plays on the one hand, and the political scene on the other. I am sure I need not remind you of the connection between Shakespeare's RICHARD II and the Earl of Essex's abortive revolt, and of the tradition, I believe well founded, that the original Court censorship of the Lord Chamberlain originated in the determination of James I to prevent dramatists from placing his favourite Buckingham upon the stage in an unfavourable light.

It is surely not too much to say that when the stage is healthy its political connection is strong. When that connection is weak the stage declines. The most notable example of this was the latter half of the last century. During that period the stage dealt almost exclusively with puppet-like characters in artificially contrived dramatic situations – a state of affairs typically and pungently summed up by Shaw in his famous word "Sardoodledum". Only the prestige and talent of actors like Irving kept the theatre alive under this dead hand. It was the reviving influence of Miss Horniman and the Manchester School of Dramatists, the Court theatre seasons of Granville Barker and Vedrenne who presented Shaw himself, Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett and authors that gave the theatre a new lease of life. This new lease of life was directly to be attributed to the return to the theatre of living characters and living issues. That is to say, by the return to the stage of politics and sociology.

This contribution of politics to drama has always been recognised as fundamental to proper representation of the dramatic scene through the medium of broadcasting. Leaving aside the classical authors such as Aristophanes and Shakespeare, the policy has been consistently pursued of representing political thought and activity and development in historical and contemporary examples. I attach herewith a by no means exhaustive list – I must apologise for its rather scrappy appearance but it has been compiled, as you know, at short notice and under difficulties – of plays which might fairly be called political and which have appeared in our programmes during the past five years. Nearly all of them might fairly be called "controversial" and is I think the greatest tribute which could be paid to the BBC's dramatic policy and to the

^a WAC R19/280/6 Drama Policy File 5a 1949-52

Corporation's consistency in resisting attempts to make of our drama nothing more than an entertainment and a show.

I should like, if I may, to add with diffidence that both on the Continent of Europe and in the United States, the standing and quality of our play production has been acknowledged not so much on account of its acting and presentation, but because of its courage and good sense in handling plays from which other broadcasting systems would shrink.

I hope that this brief note and the enclosure may be to some extent what you wanted.

VAL GIELGUD

Appendix 7: Investigation into script reading 1953 (wide divergence of opinion)

Title	Author	HR	BB	OB	SU	VG
<i>The Amnesty</i>	Lington	Yes		No	No	No
<i>Fiddlers Tree</i>	Robinson	Yes		No	No	No
<i>Villette</i>	Bronte/Holbrook	Yes		RA	RA	RA
<i>The Man Who Corrupted Hadleyburg</i>	Mark Twain	Yes		No	No	No
<i>Nothing But the Truth</i>	Beshe	Yes		No	No	No
<i>Then Adam Lost His Rib</i>	Walker/Cornell	Yes		RA	No	No
<i>Opportunity Knocks Once</i>	Horton	Yes		No	No	No
<i>Watchnight</i>	Nere	Poss		RA	RA	No
<i>The Letter</i>	Kilby	Poss		RA	RA	No
<i>Bargain in Silence</i>	Usher	Yes		No	No	No
<i>The Odour of Sanctity</i>	Eine	Poss		RA	RA	No
<i>The Cherry Fair</i>	Crowest	Yes		No	No	No
<i>Witness at the Window</i>	Harris	Yes		No	No	No
<i>Untitled Play</i>	Anon	Yes		No	Yes	Yes
<i>Order of Chivalry</i>	Ragosin	Yes		No	Poss	Poss
<i>Dark Destiny</i>	Williams	Yes		No	No	No
<i>Camilla</i>	Traill	Yes		No	Poss to No	No
<i>Five Days to Friday</i>	Macdonagh	No		Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Murder Will Out</i>	Ashton	No		Yes	No	No
<i>The Eye</i>	Gilbert	No		Yes	Poss to No	No
<i>Wolf on the Doorstep</i>	Ilott	No		Yes	No	No
<i>Old Man's Castle</i>	Howarth	No		Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>King Billy</i>	Simpson/Sladen	No		Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>No Traveller</i>	Williams		Poss	RA	No	No
<i>Come to Tea</i>	Douglas		Poss	RA	No	No
<i>Murder Mistaken</i>	Green		Yes	No	No	No
<i>The Devil is my Brother</i>	Power		No	Yes	No	No
<i>Don Juan</i>	Duncan		No	Yes	No	No
<i>The Ultimate Detergent</i>	Hatton		No	No	Yes	Yes
<i>Placido</i>	Jackson		No	No	Yes	No
<i>This Year Next Year</i>	Brown		No	Poss	Yes	Yes
<i>The Devil's Tattoo</i>	McKay		No	Yes	No	No

KEY: HR – Howard Rose, BB – Barbara Burnham, OB – Observer, SU – Script Unit, VG – Val Gielgud, RA – “Return to Author” (i.e. outright rejection recommended).

Appendix 8: BBC radio plays 2006

Saturday Play, Radio 4, Saturday 2.30, 60 minutes, except where indicated.

07/01/06	<i>Agatha Christie's Elephants Can Remember</i> (90)	Michael Bakewell	Poirot investigates the "mystery of a tragedy from the distant past." Dramatisation.
14/01/06	<i>Being Mussolini</i>	Boothby Graffoe	Mussolini double – wife prefers new identity. Comedy.
21/01/06	<i>Beware of Trains</i> (R)	John Taylor	1920s passengers discuss railway crimes. Dramatisation of V L Whitechurch & M McD Bodkin
28/01/06	<i>Bitter Pill</i> (R)	Lisa Holdsworth	DI Tully investigates student death.
04/02/06	<i>Gallery Girl</i>	Dylan Ritson	Devoted fan becomes Tallulah Bankhead's secretary in 1951.
11/02/06	<i>Death of a Salesman</i> (120) (R)	Arthur Miller	Adaptation marking 1 st anniversary of Miller's death.
18/02/06	<i>The Luneberg Variation</i>	Lavinia Murray	Dramatised from chess-based thriller by Paolo Maurensig.
25/02/06	<i>Christabel's Anarchist</i>	Patricia Hannah	1876: Russian anarchist prince and Presbyterian Edinburgh landlady.
04/03/06	<i>The Great Chocolate Murders</i>	John Fletcher	19 th century Brighton. Spinster and her poisoned chocolates.
11/03/06	<i>Cold in the Earth and 15 Wild Decembers</i>	Sally Wainwright	Emily Bronte's affair with weaver's son.
18/03/06	<i>Death Bredon</i>	Sarah LeFanu	The emotional life of Dorothy L Sayers.
25/03/06	<i>Prince Unleashed</i>	Robert Forrest	Modern fairy tale about silent girl and her dead dog.
01/04/06	<i>Royal Court at 50: Look Back in Anger</i> (90)	John Osborne	Adaptation of original "Angry Young Man" play from 1956.
08/04/06	<i>Royal Court at 50: Roots</i> (90)	Arnold Wesker	Adaptation of 1959 play.
15/04/06	<i>Royal Court at 50: The Sea</i> (90)	Edward Bond	Adaptation of 1973 play.
22/04/06	<i>Royal Court at 50: Top Girls</i> (90)	Caryl Churchill	Adaptation of 1982 play.
29/04/06	<i>Royal Court at 50: Rat in the Skull</i> (90)	Ron Hutchinson	Adaptation of 1984 play.
06/05/06	<i>Royal Court at 50: Home</i> (90)	David Storey	Adaptation of 1970 play.
13/05/06	<i>Shell Shocked</i>	Gregory Burke	Brothers separated in WWI.
20/05/06	<i>Put Money in thy Purse</i> (R)	Peter G Morgan	Michael MacLiammoir in Orson Welles' <i>Othello</i> 1949. Dramatisation of journal.
27/05/06	<i>A Gathering of Old Men</i>	Richard Cameron	Dramatisation of Ernest Gaines. Louisiana 1972: everyone claims to have killed Cajun farmer.
03/06/06	<i>Mission to Marseilles</i>	Chris Dolan	French private eye Nestor Burma. Dramatisation of Léo Malet.
10/06/06	<i>Bird of Paradise</i> (R)	Lee Pressman	Crippen's wife, Belle Elmore.
17/06/06	<i>Quartermaine's Terms</i>	Simon Gray	Adaptation of 1981 play.

24/06/06	<i>The Haverstock Hill Murder</i>	Roger Danes	Victorian female detective in George R Sims dramatisation.
01/07/06	<i>Dr Korczak's Example</i> (R)	David Grieg	Warsaw "children's novelist, paediatrician and social experimenter..."
08/07/06	<i>The Haunt of Swans</i> (R)	Sharon Oakes	New widow finds new love.
15/07/06	<i>Honour</i> (90)	Joanna Murray-Smith	Adaptation: "almost forensic dissection of a marriage..."
22/07/06	<i>The Memory Experience: The Memory of Water</i>	Shelagh Stephenson	"three sisters meet the day before their mother's funeral."
29/07/06	<i>The Balloonists</i>	Craig Stephens	Comedy: Victorian daredevil.
05/08/06	<i>Pepita's Daughter</i>	Martyn Wade	Vita Sackville-West's mother.
12/08/06 19/08/06	<i>Resurrection Man</i> (60 x 2) (R)	Bert Coules	Dramatisation of Ian Rankin Rebus thriller.
26/08/06	<i>Whenever</i> (90)	Alan Ayckbourn Denis King	Musical comedy about child and time machine.
02/09/06	<i>Adulteries of a Provincial Wife</i>	Stephen Wakeham	Flaubert's inspiration for <i>Madame Bovary</i> .
09/09/06	<i>Betrayal: Pack of Lies</i> (90)	Hugh Whitmore	Adaptation. The Kroger spy scandal 1960.
16/09/06	<i>Betrayal: Single Spies</i> (90)	Alan Bennett	Adaptation of two short plays about Guy Burgess and Air Anthony Blunt.
23/09/06	<i>Betrayal: Another Country</i> (90)	Julian Mitchell	Adaptation of play based on schooldays of Cambridge Spies.
30/09/06	<i>Betrayal: Plenty</i> (90)	David Hare	Adaptation. Englishwoman helping French Resistance and her life thereafter.
07/10/06	<i>Betrayal: A Man for All Seasons</i> (90)	Robert Bolt	Adaptation. Classic play about Thomas More.
14/10/06	<i>Peter Pan in Scarlet</i> (90)	Nick Warburton	Dramatisation. Geraldine McCaughrean's follow-up to J M Barrie, commissioned by Great Ormond Street Hospital.
21/10/06	<i>Cry Hungary</i>	Paul Viragh	Hungarian uprising 1956.
28/10/06	<i>Safe as Houses</i> (R)	Peter Wolf	Sent to clear MoD safe house, Ruth and Ellie find "disturbing clues."
04/11/06	<i>Dr Glas</i>	Vanessa Rosenthal	Dramatisation of Hjalmar Soderberg novella (1905): Stockholm GP's love for patient leads to murder.
11/11/06	<i>Devastated Areas</i>	Adam Thorpe	Armistice Day: "a moving study of civilian grief in the wake of the First World War."
18/11/06	<i>Sad Girl</i>	Sue Teddern	Recovering art looted by Nazis.
25/11/06	<i>The Haunting of Frances Child</i>	Richard Cameron	"Frances Child has Dissociative Identity Disorder..."
02/12/06	<i>Killing the Butterfly</i>	Colin MacDonald	Romantic thriller. Two murder witnesses under police protection
09/12/06	<i>When Marnie Was There</i>	Beaty Rubens	Dramatised Joan G Robinson novel. Two lonely young girls become friends. One is dead.
16/12/06	<i>Little Nell</i> (90)	Simon Gray	Adaptation of forthcoming stage play about Dickens's affair with actress Ellen Ternan.

23/12/06	<i>The Nutcracker</i> (R)	Hattie Naylor	"dramatisation of E T A Hoffman's epic tale..."
30/12/06	<i>The Real Thing</i> (90)	Tom Stoppard	Adaptation "about the true nature of love and the impermanence of desire."

Classic Serial – Radio 4 Sunday afternoon 3.00, repeated Saturday evening 9.00, all 60-minute dramatisations, two episodes except where indicated.

01/01/06	<i>The French Lieutenant's Woman</i> (John Fowles)	Graham White	"Victorian gentleman [steps] outside of society's strictures when he falls in love..."
15/01/06	<i>The Fountain Overflows</i> (Rebecca West) (6 eps)	Robin Brooks	"story of childhood, seen through the eyes of Rose."
26/02/06	<i>Lord Arthur Savile's Crime</i> (Oscar Wilde)	Mike Walker	"Conspiracy, innuendo and fate ... delicious satire."
12/03/06	<i>Passing</i> (Nella Larsen)	Annie Caulfield	"racial issues in 1930s America."
26/03/06	<i>A House for Mr Biswas</i> (V S Naipaul)	Brian Wright	"Mr Mohun Biswas was born unlucky and has stayed that way for 46 calamitous years..."
09/04/06	<i>The Code of the Woosters</i> (P G Wodehouse)	Judith French	Classic silly-ass comedy.
23/04/06	<i>Dead Souls</i> (Nikolai Gogol)	Dan Rebellato	"A comic tour de force about human folly."
07/05/06	<i>Kipps</i> (H G Wells)	Mike Walker	"The story of a simple soul."
21/05/06	<i>Memento Mori</i> (Muriel Spark)	Diana Griffiths	"funny and often touching observation of old age..."
04/06/06	<i>Amerika</i> (Franz Kafka)	Graham White	Karl leaves Prague for New York
18/06/06	<i>Basil</i> (Wilkie Collins)	Robin Brooks	Basil marries beneath his station.
02/07/06	<i>She</i> (Rider Haggard)	Hattie Naylor	African adventure.
16/07/06	<i>The Name of the Rose</i> (Umberto Eco)	Chris Dolan	Medieval murder mystery.
30/07/06	<i>Great Expectations</i> (Charles Dickens) (3 eps)	Martyn Wade	"the pursuit of expectations of wealth..."
20/08/06	<i>Erewhon</i> (Samuel Butler)	Eamonn O'Niell, Martin Shea James O'Neill	"A classic satire on Victorian society."
03/09/06	<i>The Ministry of Fear</i> (Graham Greene)	Sean O'Brien	"dark thriller about identity and redemption..."
17/09/06	<i>Whistle Down the Wind</i> ^a (Mary Haley Bell) (R) (1 ep)	Diana Griffiths	Pennine children think they've found Jesus.
23/09/06	<i>Lady Chatterley's Lover</i> (D H Lawrence)	Micheline Wandor	Constance and the gamekeeper, Mellors.
24/09/06	<i>The River</i> (Rumer Godden) (R) (1 ep)	Judy Allen	Great War disrupts Indian idyll.
01/10/06	<i>The Secret Agent</i>	David Naphine	"Conrad's prescient black

^a Unusually for the *Class Serial* slot, *Whistle Down the Wind* was a repeat. Uniquely, it was not repeated the following Saturday evening. Instead, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* began on Saturday September 23, with Part 2 the following Saturday and no repeat. A repeat of the one-episode dramatisation of *The River* aired on Sunday September 23, again not repeated the following Saturday, and *The Secret Agent* resumed the normal pattern on Sunday October 1.

	(Joseph Conrad)		comedy, written in 1907..."
15/10/06	<i>The Cairo Trilogy</i> (Naguib Mahfouz) (3 eps)	Ayesha Menon	"family saga chronicling the life of a middle-class ... family in early 20 th century Egypt."
05/11/06	<i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> (Fyodor Dostoyevsky) (5 eps)	Melissa Murray	"19 th -century psychological thriller."
10/12/06	<i>The Midnight Folk</i> (John Masefield)	Christopher William Hill	"Abner has dark magic, but Kay has the midnight folk to help him."
24/12/06	<i>The Inn</i> (Guy de Maupassant) (1 ep)	Sue Glover	"Haunting short story" (1886).
31/12/06	<i>Resurrection</i> (1 of 2 eps) (Leo Tolstoy)	Robert Forrest	"a powerful story of impossible love."

Drama on 3 – Radio 3 Sunday evening 8.00, 90 minutes except where indicated.

01/01/06	<i>The Club</i>	Gregory Whitehead	"strikes to the fungal roots of the American imagination through <i>noir</i> comedy."
08/01/06	<i>Black Dirt</i>	Neil Leyshon	Frank on deathbed. Morphine awakens memories of a past tragedy.
15/01/06	<i>Writing the City</i>	Alan Plater etc	New plays celebrating Leeds.
22/01/06	<i>Hold My Breath</i> (75)	Ryan Craig	Young black teacher and an "appalling accusation".
29/01/06	<i>Pale Fire</i> (105) (R)	Robert Forrest	Dramatisation of 1962 Nabokov novel.
05/02/06	<i>Snow</i>	James Friel	Dramatisation of Orhan Pamuk. Poet and political exile returns to Turkey.
12/02/06	<i>I Thought I Heard Buddy Bolden Shout</i> (75) ^b	Laurence Allan	Cornet player dies in asylum, 1931.
19/02/06	<i>Revenge</i>	Michael Duke	Adaptation. "It's Samhain, the Celtic festival of New Year, when ... the veil between the living and the dead is lifted."
26/02/06	<i>Lost in Liverpool</i>	Val McDermid ^c	Thriller "recorded in the Williamson Tunnels underneath Liverpool."
05/03/05	<i>Shylock</i> (120)	Arnold Wesker	Adaptation of 1976 play.
12/03/06	<i>The History Boys</i> (150)	Alan Bennett	Adaptation of current stage play and film.
19/03/06	<i>When You Cure Me</i> (75)	Jack Thorne	Love and death and 17-year-olds. ^d
26/03/06	<i>Hand Print</i>	Debbie Tucker Green	"an intense encounter in a bar..."
02/04/06	<i>Royal Court at 50: 50 Years On</i>	Various	Live broadcast from theatre. Extracts of significant plays.
09/04/06	<i>Embers/Krapp's Last</i>	Samuel Beckett	Celebration of Beckett centenary.

^b Winner of Radio 3 music drama competition *Broken and Blue*.

^c Full credit reads: "Written by Martin O'Brien, Christine Marshall, Barbara Phillips, Jonathan Larkin, Charlotte Allan and Paul Butler from a storyboard by Val McDermid."

^d "Produced in association with the Bush Theatre, London."

	<i>Tape/Not I</i> (135)		
16/04/06	<i>Waiting for Godot</i> (120)	Samuel Beckett	Celebration of Beckett centenary.
30/04/06	<i>Billiards at Half-Past Nine</i>	Claire Luckham	Heinrich Böll dramatisation.
07/05/06	<i>The Possessed</i> (100)	Lou Stein	Dostoyevsky dramatisation.
14/05/06	<i>The Maids</i> (85) (R)	Jean Genet	Adaptation by Neil Bartlett.
21/05/06	<i>The Pretenders</i> (150) (R)	Henrik Ibsen	Centenary adaptation.
28/05/06	<i>The Lysistrata Project</i>	Ryan Craig	Contemporary reworking of Aristophanes. Women withhold sex from violent men.
04/06/06	<i>Breakfast with Mugabe</i>	Fraser Grace	President thinks he's being haunted by dead comrade.
11/06/06	<i>Gilgamesh</i> (120)	Jeremy Howe	Dramatisation of ancient epic.
18/06/06	<i>Features Like Mine</i> (R)	Ted Whitehead	"man ... re-examining his relationship with his father."
25/06/06	<i>The Orchid Grower</i> (R)	Sebastian Baczkiewicz	Yuri Nosenko, held without trial for years while civil rages in CIA
02/07/06	<i>The Lion of Chechnya</i> (R)	Leila Abouela	Diplomatic kidnapping in Tsarist Russia.
09/07/06	<i>Hotel Cristobel</i> (R)	Caryl Phillips	English woman fears loss of her Caribbean hotel following independence.
23/07/06	<i>Doggie's Nirvana</i> (75)	Jin Yun	Adaptation: "a sideways look at Chinese history..."
30/07/06	<i>Salome</i>	Lizzie Hopley	New take on bible story.
06/08/06	<i>Mrs Warren's Profession</i> (110)	Bernard Shaw	Adaptation of 1893 play about prostitution and double standards
13/08/06	<i>Mr Puntila and his man Matti</i>	Bertolt Brecht	Adapted and updated by Lee Hall.
10/09/06	<i>Hippomania</i> (R)	Snoo Wilson	Betjeman in Dublin, WWII
17/09/06	<i>A Day in the Death of Joe Egg</i> (R)	Peter Nichols	1967 play about disabled child.
24/09/06	<i>A Bequest to the Nation</i> (120) (R)	Terence Rattigan	Nelson and Lady Hamilton. Adaptation.
01/10/06	<i>Let Me</i>	Howard Barker	Romano-British landowner and invading barbarians.
08/10/06	<i>Hold My Breath</i> (75) (R)	Ryan Craig	"The life of an idealistic young black school teacher is turned upside down by an unexpected and appalling accusation."
15/10/06	<i>An Enemy of the People</i> (95)	Martyn Lynch	"A modern version, set in Belfast, of Ibsen's classic drama"
22/10/06	<i>Days and Nights in Bedlam</i> (80) (R)	Fred D'Aguiar	"when Otis is taken to the closed ward of a London mental hospital he's desperate to return to his Queen Penelope and his Kingdom."
29/10/06	<i>Death and the Penguin</i> (80)	Andrei Kurkov	Adaptation: "satire about an obituarist and his unlikely relationship with a penguin."
05/11/05	<i>Complications</i> (45)	Jeff Young Jennifer John Skyray	"the strange tale of the transplantation of a human soul."
12/11/06	<i>In Parenthesis</i> (R)	Douglas Cleverdon	Dramatisation of "unique prose-poem to mark Remembrance Sunday."
19/11/06	<i>True West</i> (85)	Sam Shepard	Adaptation: "a sinister portrayal of character transformation."

26/11/06	<i>The Violence of Silence</i> (75)	Marida Chheang	"drama documentary exploring the human cost of the genocide in Cambodia..."
03/12/06	<i>Fuente Ovejuna</i> (120)	Lope da Vega	Adaptation by Adrian Mitchell.
10/12/06	<i>The Thebans</i> (240)	Sophocles	Adaptation of three tragedies in Timberlake Wertenbaker's new translation.
17/10/06	<i>Cymbeline</i> (150)	William Shakespeare	Adaptation of late "problem play"
24/12/06	<i>For the Time Being</i> (150)	W H Auden	"A modern mystery cycle..."
31/12/06	<i>The History Boys</i> (150) (R)	Alan Bennett	See above.

Woman's Hour Serial – Radio 4 weekday mornings 10.45, repeated same evening 7.45. All five 15-minute episodes except where indicated.

02/01/06	<i>Ladies of Letters Go Global</i>	Lou Wakefield Carole Hayman	Comic adventures of two grandmothers abroad.
09/01/06	<i>Cooking for Michael Collins</i>	Jane Purcell	"Pidgie Rigney – spy, gunrunner and cook."
16/01/06	<i>The Changing Room</i>	Louise Gooding	"moments of change in the lives of different women."
23/01/06	<i>Tennessee's Women</i>	Anna Linstrum	Adaptation of 5 early one-act plays by Tennessee Williams.
30/01/06	<i>A Five-Year Sentence</i>	Richard Monks	Woman's retirement given meaning by 5-year diary. Dramatisation from Bernice Rubens.
06/02/06	<i>A Harlot's Progress</i>	Jonathan Myerson	Rollicking comedy based on Hogarth's engravings.
13/02/06	<i>Minor Characters</i>	Rachael McGill	Dramatised memoir of Beat muse Joyce Johnson.
20/02/06	<i>The Interpreter</i>	Anjum Malik	"Irfan wants [Nina] to find a Persian word for 'gay'..."
27/02/06	<i>Jane's Story</i> (10 eps)	Alison Joseph	"Secrets and lies are at the heart of this intriguing and labyrinthine thriller."
13/03/06	<i>Our Father Who Art in the Tree</i>	Kate McAll	Brisbane 10-year-old thinks dead father is living in tree. Dramatisation of Judy Pascoe.
20/03/06	<i>The Voyage Out</i> (10 eps)	Helen Edmundson	Dramatised Virginia Woolf set on ship bound for South America in 1913.
03/04/06	<i>Friends Like These</i>	Fay Rusling Oriane Messina	"Helen and Gail are best friends, separated only by the fact that Gail is in prison for trying to murder Helen."
10/04/06	<i>Snap!</i>	Charlotte Cory	Monologues: "a camera is pointed at the subject, and a vision of a whole life flashes by."
No serial w/c 17/04/06			

24/04/06	<i>I Leap over the Wall</i>	April de Angelis	Dramatised autobiography of Monica Baldwin, who became a nun in 1914 and left in 1942 at height of London Blitz.
01/05/06	<i>Conversations with my Bailiff</i>	Wendy Oberman	"relationship of convenience and interdependence" between single mother and bailiff.
08/05/06	<i>Far From Past It</i>	Claire Downe	"Madcap comedy ... five 80-year-olds struggling to keep their community farm alive..."
15/05/06	<i>Beach Huts</i>	Various	Portmanteau series. Five plays set in Brighton beach huts.
22/05/06	<i>Childless</i>	Various	Portmanteau series. Five childless women.
29/05/06	<i>Ottoline and Bertie</i>	Derek Bowskill	Affair between Lady Ottoline Morrell and Bertrand Russell.
05/06/06	<i>Island Blue</i>	Various	Portmanteau series set in retreat on remote Scottish island.
12/06/06	<i>The Family Tree</i>	Jennifer Howarth	Dramatisation of "Carole Cadwalladr's novel about family and free will."
19/06/06	<i>The Paston Letters</i> (10 eps)	Vanessa Rosenthal	Dramatisation of 15 th century family archive.
03/07/06	<i>Standing Still, Running</i>	Elizabeth Reeder	Real time drama about witnesses to a Washington shooting.
10/07/06	<i>School Runs</i>	Alexis Zegerman	Five comedy monologues.
17/07/06	<i>Birthday Girl</i>	Various	Portmanteau. "Five short plays about men preparing to celebrate their partner's birthday."
24/07/06	<i>Maps for Lost Lovers</i> (10 eps)	Rukshana Ahmad	Dramatisation of Nadeem Aslam. The story of Chanda and the radical Jugna.
07/08/06	<i>The Flower Room</i>	Shaun MacLoughlin	Dramatisation: autobiography of Chinese pop star Namu. ^e
14/08/06	<i>Dolce</i>	Penny Leicester	Dramatisation set in occupied France, 1941. ^f
21/08/06	<i>In a German Pension</i>	Deborah Levy	Dramatisation of 5 Katherine Mansfield stories (1910).
28/08/06	<i>Betjeman's Women</i>	Paul Dodgson	Women in Betjeman's poems.
04/09/06	<i>Madame Bovary</i> (10 eps)	Diana Griffiths	Flaubert dramatisation.
18/09/06	<i>Small Island</i> (15 eps)	Pat Cumper	Dramatisation of Deborah Levy's culture-clash novel.
09/10/06	<i>The Blank Wall</i>	Rachel Joyce	Dramatisation: American <i>noir</i> by Elizabeth Sanxay Holding.
16/10/06	<i>Inner Voices</i>	Various	"series of character monologues by top female comedians..."
23/10/06	<i>Fragments of Amy</i>	Bill Murphy	Detective thriller.
30/10/06	<i>SOS</i>	Katie Hims	"the troubles of [a] seafaring family over the century following the introduction of the Morse

^e *Leaving Mother Lake* by Yang Erche Namu and Christine Mathieu.

^f "The second volume of Irène Némirovsky's *Suite Française* ... written in 1942 before her arrest and death in Auschwitz."

			code SOS signal in 1906.”
06/11/06	<i>The Farming of Bones</i>	Jackie Kay	Dramatisation of Edwidge Danticat novel set in Haiti 1937.
13/11/06	<i>Guiding Lights</i>	Various	Dramatisations of short stories by 5 leading women writers.
20/11/06	<i>Immigration Stories</i>	Sarah Daniels	Immigration officers and asylum seekers.
27/11/06	<i>A Room of Her Own</i>	Katie Hims	5 famous women writers and the rooms in which they wrote.
04/12/06	<i>Male Order</i>	Nick Russell-Pavier Jeremy Myerson	Mail order brides.
11/12/06	<i>A House to Let</i>	Martyn Wade	Dramatised collaboration of Dickens, Wilkie Collins and Mrs Gaskell.
18/12/06	<i>Baghdad Burning</i>	John Fletcher	Dramatised Iraqi blog.
25/12/06	<i>Old Peter's Russian Tales</i>	David Britton	Dramatised stories by Arthur Ransome.

Afternoon Play – Radio 4, weekday afternoons 2.15-3.00

02/01/06	<i>Abel's Law</i>	Hugh Costello	1875: man refuses to have son vaccinated
03/01/06	<i>Steve O'Something</i>	Sebastian Baczkiewicz	Galen “meets the man of her dreams at a party but ... no one knows who he is. Does [he] exist?”
04/01/06	<i>Jadoo (R)</i>	Amit Gupta	Rival curry houses in Leicester's culinary golden mile
05/01/06	<i>A Summertime (R)</i>	Don Haworth	Unforeseen happiness on Lancashire moors, 1939
06/01/06	<i>It's Too Late Now</i>	Brian Sibley	50 th anniversary of death of A A Milne
09/01/06	<i>A Clown on God's Stage</i>	Judith French	Woodbine Willie, inspirational preacher and poet.
10/01/06	<i>Another Part of the Wood (R)</i>	Steve Jacobs	Bob and Pat move to rural France to escape rat race.
11/01/06	<i>Dinner in the Iguanadon</i>	Chrissie Gittins	1854 scientists dine in plaster cast of the monster.
12/01/06	<i>Dear Doctor Goebbels (R)</i>	Neville Smith	Young Jew fits Goebell's surgical boots.
13/01/06	<i>From Father With Love</i>	Mark Burgess	Ian Fleming writes <i>Chitty Chitty Bang Bang</i> for son.
16/01/06	<i>Talking Latin (R)</i>	Carolyn Bonnyman	Karen runs away from husband to run burger van.
17/01/06	<i>Once a Friend</i>	Stephen Phelps	John and Leo meet for the first time in 30 years.
18/01/06	<i>The Ballad of Shane O'Neill</i>	Jimmy McAleavy	“Irreverent historical fantasy.” Ireland, 1558.
19/01/06	<i>The Eve of St Agnes (R)</i>	John Keats	The lovers, Porphyro and Madeline. Dramatisation.
20/01/06	<i>Todtnauberg</i>	John Banville	1967 meeting between Holocaust survivor and Nazi philosopher Martin Heidegger.
23/01/06	<i>To Serve Them All My</i>	Shaun McKenna	1918: “Davy Powlett-Jones,

to 27/01/06	<i>Days</i> (5 eps)		invalided out of the army, faces a new start in life." Dramatisation.
30/01/06	<i>The Yellow Wallpaper</i>	Charlotte Perkins Gilman	Adaptation. (1899) Woman isolated for post-natal depression.
31/01/06	<i>Master and Man</i>	Jonathan Holloway	Dramatisation of Tolstoy. Title characters lost in blizzard.
01/02/06	<i>Markheim</i>	John Taylor	Dramatisation of R L Stevenson. Stalker in fog-bound London, Christmas Day 1886.
02/02/06	<i>Ties</i> (R)	Amber Lone	"old school acquaintance becomes a regular fare in Yasser's cab."
03/02/06	<i>The Withered Arm</i>	Louise Doughty	Thomas Hardy dramatisation. "Two women in the grip of passions beyond their control."
06/02/06	<i>The Fortunestown Kid</i>	Dermot Bolger	Dubliner Shane joins English Premiership football club.
07/02/06	<i>Under the Loofah Tree</i>	Giles Cooper	Revival of 1958 play to mark 40 th anniversary of death.
08/02/06	<i>The Discourse of Two Once-Young Women</i>	Jane Beeson	"Three old friends from schooldays during the war plan to meet up."
09/02/06	<i>Michael</i> (R)	Neil Leyshon	Dramatisation of Wordsworth poem about Cumbrian farmer.
10/02/06	<i>Pips</i>	Stevie Davies	Welsh dentist and receptionist. "Gentle, melancholic comedy."
13/02/06	<i>A Nice Little Trip to Spain</i> (R)	Don Taylor	"Great Uncle Jack's heroic death in the Spanish Civil War is family folklore..."
14/02/06	<i>One Foot in the Cuckoo's Nest</i>	Ian Macpherson Magi Gibson	"Edinburgh-based correspondents of the <i>Irish Mail</i> ."
15/02/06	<i>Curry Tales</i>	Rani Moorthy	3 ironic comedies about women across the world making curry.
16/02/06	<i>The Powder</i>	Adam Thorpe	1946. Jack returns from war to the family farm.
17/02/06	<i>Life is a Dream</i> (R)	Shelagh Stephenson	"Sam Lazarus awakens to find himself in a parallel reality..."
20/02/06	<i>Cast in Stone</i>	Rachel Bentham	A pagan woman poses for the stonemasons at Wells Cathedral.
21/02/06	<i>The Female Husband</i>	Sheila Hannon	Dramatisation of Henry Fielding. 1746 woman flogged for marrying as a man.
22/02/06	<i>The Passion of Plum Duff</i>	Alastair Jessiman	"comedy about the clash of spiritual and human yearning..."
23/02/06	<i>Einstein in Cromer</i> (R)	Mark Burgess	1933. Einstein spends a month's "cheerful exile' in Cromer."
24/02/06	<i>A Bit of a Hole</i>	Christine Marshall	Comedy about "warring septuagenarians."
27/02/06	<i>Rapture</i>	Carol Ann Duffy	Love poems, winner of T S Eliot Prize 2006.
28/02/06	<i>Bumps and Bruises</i> (R)	Ben Edwards Rachel New	Comedy: "the world's most chaotic antenatal class."
01/03/06	<i>The Cold Mann</i>	Tom McGrath	Author's self-imposed exile.
02/03/06	<i>Money with Menaces</i> (R)	Patrick Hamilton	2004 revival of classic 1937 radio play.
03/03/06	<i>Daphnis and Chloe</i>	Hattie Naylor	Dramatised from Longus. "Two

			naïve young lovers beset by pirates, aided by supernatural..."
06/03/06	<i>Dan Quixote</i>	John Morrison	Man thinks he's Don Quixote.
07/03/06	<i>The Domino Man of Lancashire</i>	Nick Leather	"Witty look at loneliness, romance and whether record breaking really matters."
08/03/06	<i>The Promise (R)</i>	Pat Davis	"Friendship and fidelity, funerals and flat-pack coffins..."
09/03/06	<i>Time After Time</i>	Gerry Jones	Revival of 1979 radio play: two men trapped in nightmare world.
10/03/06	<i>Alice in Paris</i>	Elizabeth Lewis	"the pitfalls of romantic fantasy."
13/03/06	<i>The Bride's Chamber (R)</i>	Michael Eaton	Dramatised Dickens ghost story.
14/03/06	<i>Amy's Spaghetti</i>	Colin Hough	Karaoke comedy.
15/03/06	<i>The Midnight House</i>	Jonathan Hall	"period ghost story"
16/03/06	<i>How I Wonder What You Are (R)</i>	Richard Hurford	Alison pursues husband down the Nile.
17/03/06	<i>Blind Eye</i>	Sharon Oakes	Policeman about to get a medal for bravery shuns physical confrontations.
20/03/06	<i>The Big Bow Mystery</i>	Robert Messik	Locked room murder mystery, dramatised from Israel Zangwill (1892).
21/03/06	<i>The Cenci Family</i>	Lizzie Hopley	Rome 1599. New take on famous murder.
22/03/06	<i>A Tiny Light in the Darkness</i>	Ursula Rani Sarma	August 2005. Tube carriage plunged into darkness.
23/03/06	<i>Ronnie Gecko (R)</i>	Alexis Zegerman	Alice records animal sounds, Ronnie cares for reptiles...
24/03/06	<i>Fiona and the Hetty Closet</i>	Char March	Comedy. 40 yr old lesbian finds herself attracted to men.
27/03/06	<i>The Man Who Built Tunnels</i>	Natalia Power	"79-year old Duke of Portland receives a visitation from a once-famous opera singer."
28/03/06	<i>The Room</i>	Paul Brennan	"Rash and Doxa ... struggle with their own demons as they try to gain entry."
29/03/06	<i>Run For Home</i>	Carol Willis	Widow and estranged daughter train for Run for Life. Comedy.
30/03/06	<i>Elevenes With Twiggy</i>	Simon Farquhar	Boy meets idol (played by Twiggy herself) as 60s run out.
31/03/06	<i>To Be A Pilgrim⁸</i>	Rachel Joyce	Retired Harold walks to Worthing to visit dying secretary.
03/04/06	<i>McLevy</i>	David Ashton	Series of 4 adventures for Victorian Inspector.
04/04/06	<i>In the Garden</i>	Martin Shea James O'Neill Martin O'Neill	Academic finds his heart has moved to the wrong place. Comedy.
05/04/06	<i>The Accident (R)</i>	Jonathan Davidson	Railway signalman and his daughter in early 1960s.
06/04/06	<i>The Man Who Mistook His Life for an Organiser (R)</i>	Mike Harris	"disastrously comic tale of what happens when technology takes over one man's life."
07/04/06	<i>The Mecklington Miracle</i>	Hannah McGill Rachel McGill	"local hero hasn't stepped out of her house for years until Pedro arrives from Columbia." Comedy

⁸ Co-winner Peter Tinniswood Award 2007

10/04/06	<i>McLevy</i>	David Ashton	Series of 4 adventures for Victorian Inspector.
11/04/06	<i>Mustard Seed</i> (R)	Nick Warburton	Based on Buddhist fable about travelling healer.
12/04/06	<i>Stan</i> (R)	Neil Brand	Stan Laurel and dying Oliver Hardy. Also done as TV play.
13/04/06	<i>Sam o' Bedlam</i>	Mark Burgess	Samuel Beckett's 70 th birthday.
14/04/06	<i>Talking to Ted</i> (R)	Tim Clark	Adaptation of Dave Cohen's play. Stand-up comic talks to daughter's teddy bear.
17/04/06	<i>McLevy</i>	David Ashton	Series of 4 adventures for Victorian Inspector.
18/04/06	<i>Just One More Day</i>	Pat Davis	"woman briefly reunited with her dead mother."
19/04/06	<i>Odd</i>	Robert Shearman	Comedy: "Overnight every word in the English language seems to have changed its meaning."
20/04/06	<i>May Child</i> (R)	Elizabeth Kuti	"On Margaret's 67 th birthday, an uninvited guest calls who shares the same birthday."
21/04/06	<i>Signs and Wonders</i> (R)	Frankie Bailey	Deserted Guy meets "unusual young woman [who] makes him challenge his life so far."
24/04/06	<i>McLevy</i>	David Ashton	Series of 4 adventures for Victorian Inspector.
25/04/06	<i>How to Live</i>	Bobby Baker	Performance artist (Baker herself) mocks self-help therapy.
26/04/06	<i>Teddy and Toad</i> (R)	Jerome Vincent	Teddy Roosevelt helps to publish <i>Wind in the Willows</i> in US.
27/04/06	<i>Mind Out</i>	Jonathan Myerson	Cognitive therapy comedy.
28/04/06	<i>Norman</i> (R)	Mike Stott	Johnny Vegas comic monologue about marginalized man.
01/05/06	<i>Nine Days in May</i>	Robin Glendinning	BBC and the General Strike.
02/05/06	<i>The Nature of the Beast</i>	Richard Hurford	"In a besieged city, a zoo faces a death sentence."
03/05/06	<i>A Brief Interruption</i> (R)	Ben Steiner	A "weary and careworn God bemoans ... frustrations of being the Supreme Being."
04/05/06	<i>Harpo Goes to Leningrad</i>	Lee Pressman	Harpo Marx tours Russia 1933.
05/05/06	<i>Resurrecting Schubert</i> (R)	Nicholas McNery	Drama documentary about Schubert's deathbed.
08/05/06	<i>MacMorris</i> (R)	John Morrison	Comic fantasy about minor character in Henry V.
09/05/06	<i>Connecting, Call Waiting</i>	Katie Hims	Women gets "Help me" text from husband in Uzbekistan.
10/05/06	<i>Connecting, Last Call</i>	Mike Walker	PR woman suspects company role in Uzbekistan.
11/05/06	<i>Connecting, Network Failure</i>	Sarah Woods	IT trainer in Mozambique.
12/05/06	<i>Migrant Memory</i>	Samina Baig	Autobiographical quest to make sense of sister's early death.
15/05/06	<i>The Cemetery Confessions</i> (R)	Louise Welsh etc	Famous dead in Père Lachaise cemetery confess their sins.
16/05/06	<i>Columbus, the Bones of the Story</i>	Robin Glendinning	500 th anniversary of Columbus's death.
17/05/06	<i>The Child That Books</i>	Francis Spufford	Dramatisation of his own memoir

	<i>Built (R)</i>		
18/05/06	<i>An Interlude of Men</i>	Lesley Bruce	"Only women friends survive the test of time."
19/05/06	<i>Daunt and Dervish</i>	Guy Meredith	Comic detective series, London 1947.
22/05/06	<i>Bringing Eddie Home</i>	John Peacock	1965. East End couple's son dies in Aden.
23/05/06	<i>Duty</i>	Michael Butt	Ibsen's writer's block cured by letters of young female admirer.
24/05/06	<i>Four Steps to Heaven</i>	Lloyd Peters	Actor considers converting to Judaism for girlfriend. Comedy.
25/05/06	<i>A Long Time Dead (R)</i>	Sheila Goff	Mature 'girlie' weekend in Paris.
26/05/06	<i>Daunt and Dervish</i>	Guy Meredith	Comic detective series, London 1947.
29/05/06	<i>The Wendy House (R)</i>	Tessa Hadley	Miranda, 50, recalls the end of childhood innocence.
30/05/06	<i>Duce's Bonce</i>	Robin Brooks	1956: woman in asylum convinced she shot Mussolini.
31/05/06	<i>The Lodsell Cod (R)</i>	Dan Jamieson	"two brothers in love with the same girl in 1950s Devon."
01/06/06	<i>The Disappearing Island (R)</i>	Nigel Richardson	"A lakeland fantasy about mid-life crisis and the romantic imagination."
02/06/06	<i>Daunt and Dervish</i>	Guy Meredith	Comic detective series, London 1947.
05/06/06	<i>Llama Lashes and Grumpy Old Gits</i>	Anne Edyvean Jonathan Myserson	"Verbatim extracts from real blogs tell how isolated individuals found each other online..."
06/06/06	<i>Lucky Lonny</i>	Mike Stott	Lottery win changes man's life.
07/06/06	<i>The Sun at Midnight</i>	Melissa Murray	Mental nurse reads poem to patients. One claims he wrote it.
08/06/06	<i>The Man (R)</i>	Raymond Briggs	Dramatisation of own novel about tiny man in boy's room.
09/06/06	<i>Daunt and Dervish</i>	Guy Meredith	Comic detective series, London 1947.
12/06/06	<i>Lifestyles of the Trapped and Cabbaged (R)</i>	Roy Boulter	"comedy of delusion." Two accountants in Shanghai.
13/06/06	<i>Headwrecked, Shanghaied and Shipless</i>	Roy Boulter	Companion piece to the above, from wives' point of view.
14/06/06	<i>Let's Make A Festival</i>	Michael Bakewell	Britten and Aldeburgh Festival.
15/06/06	<i>The Captured Enemy</i>	Edward Marriott	American prisoners in British gaols during War of Independence.
16/06/06	<i>Daunt and Dervish</i>	Guy Meredith	Comic detective series, London 1947.
19/06/06	<i>River's Up</i>	Alex Jones	When River Severn floods, Tom and Sally row to France.
20/06/06	<i>Man in the Moon</i>	Richard Lumsden	"verse drama set in Derbyshire and spanning nearly 40 years."
21/06/06	<i>Rumpole and the Primrose Path (R)</i>	John Mortimer	Series of 4 comic legal stories.
22/06/06	<i>Dido (R)</i>	Karen McCarthy	1779: Zoffany paints two young ladies at Kenwood House.
23/06/06	<i>A Song for Edmond Shakespeare (R)</i>	Gary Bleasdale	William's actor brother.
26/06/06	<i>Steinbeck in Avalon</i>	Ray Brown	Dramatised from Steinbeck's

			Arthurian writings.
27/06/06	<i>Dizzy Spells</i> (R)	David Pownall	Young Disraeli tries to cheer depressed sister.
28/06/06	<i>Rumpole and the Scales of Justice</i> (R)	John Mortimer	Series of 4 comic legal stories.
29/06/06	<i>All I Said Was Great</i>	Colin Shindler	Football and family.
30/06/06	<i>The Conversation</i>	Trevor Friedman	Drama documentary about Holocaust survivor.
03/07/06	<i>Madam Butterfly's Child</i>	Lesley Ross	Extra at the Royal Albert Hall.
04/07/06	<i>The Small Print</i> (R)	Jerome Vincent	Comedy. Man fights back against small print.
05/07/06	<i>Rumpole and the Vanishing Juror</i> (R)	John Mortimer	Series of 4 comic legal stories.
06/07/06	<i>Hush Little Baby</i>	Esther Wilson	Girl with selective mutism.
07/07/06	<i>Church Ladies</i> (R)	Aileen Gonsalves	Volunteers go on strike.
10/07/06	<i>Belongings</i>	Dominique Moloney	Burglars find dead body and suicide note.
11/07/06	<i>Star Man</i> (R)	Alastair Jessiman	Returning to Glasgow for father's funeral, Tom recalls Glam Rock era of 1974.
12/07/06	<i>Rumpole Redeemed</i> (R)	John Mortimer	Series of 4 comic legal stories.
13/07/06	<i>Heft Like Herdwick</i>	Red Sky Writers ^h	Woman returns to her roots – and a body dragged from the lake.
14/07/06	<i>Kaffir Lillies</i>	Sue Eckstein	Expats in Nigeria, 1929.
17/07/06	<i>Marcia Sproule</i>	Christopher Fitz-Simon	Belfast evacuees WWII.
18/07/06	<i>Mapping the Heart</i> (R)	Beatrice Colin	Plane crash in Brazilian rainforest, 1950.
19/07/06	<i>Rumpole Returns</i>	John Mortimer	Series of 2 comic legal stories.
20/07/06	<i>An Island Between Heaven and Earth</i> (R)	Alistair Rutherford	Unemployed shipyard workers and trainee ministers, Iona, 1938.
21/07/06	<i>Me and My Man</i>	Bettina Gracias	Cultural comedy set in dry cleaner's shop.
24/07/06	<i>The Memory Experience: In Search of Oldton</i>	Tim Wright	"memory, loss and the suicide of his father..."
25/07/06	<i>You Shouldn't Have Come</i>	Meic Povey	Shooting of Welsh PC 1961.
26/07/06	<i>Rumpole Returns</i>	John Mortimer	Series of 2 comic legal stories.
27/07/06	<i>Darling Alicia</i>	Vernee Samuel	Dramatised love letters from the 1960s (Alicia & Steve Merrett).
28/07/06	<i>Auguste Levasseur – Chef des Claqueurs</i>	Mike Harris	The world of 19 th century Parisian opera.
31/07/06	<i>The Memory Experience: The August Birthdays</i>	Frances Byrnes	Katherine (39) revisits "an earlier, more eventful birthday."
01/08/06	<i>The Parting</i> (R)	Tanika Gupta	Four men miss their train, spend evening in station bar.
02/08/06	<i>Thrift</i>	Rebecca Trick-Walker	Painted a watercolour, Gwen reflects on her 40-year marriage.
03/8/06	<i>Callum</i> (R)	F Todhunter	Comedy "set in a vocational college for the disabled."
04/08/06	<i>Hands</i>	Courtia Newland	"Anissa Marie struggles to claim her ancestral gift, the power to heal with her hands."
07/08/06	<i>The Memory Experience: The Doll's Tea Set</i> (R)	Sue Glover	"Cara is four years old when her mother disappears..."

^h "a group of Cumbrian women, led by Zosia Wand."

08/08/06	<i>A Field of Hay</i>	Gillian Clarke	Family secret revealed.
09/08/06	<i>Stages of Sound: Sugar and Snow</i>	Samantha Ellis	Filiz “doesn’t want to marry Murat and run her mother’s café”
10/08/06	<i>House Rules</i>	Sebastian Baczkiewicz	Gambler Spike plays one last big stakes game – with the devil.
11/08/06	<i>The Sensitive</i>	Alastair Jessiman	“Thomas ... is adept at solving crimes – but is his extraordinary gift a blessing or a curse?”
14/08/06	<i>The Memory Experience: The Recall Man (R)</i>	David Napthine	Two-part thriller about forensic psychologist in Teeside.
15/08/06	<i>This Cold August Light</i>	Jerome Vincent	1816, the year without a summer.
16/08/06	<i>Stages of Sound: Silver Grey</i>	Vincent Cleghorne	Generation gap – “an older peoples’ tea club in Bootle.”
17/08/06	<i>Black Out</i>	Damian Barr Laura Lockington	Dan and Lucy, in denial about one night stand, get stuck in a lift
18/08/06	<i>The Book of Love</i>	Mark Illis	Promiscuous Tom discovers his feminine side – literally.
21/08/06	<i>The Memory Experience: The Recall Man (R)</i>	David Napthine	Two-part thriller about forensic psychologist in Teeside.
22/08/06	<i>London Pride</i>	Adrian Middleton	Family in crisis: Nail bombing of Admiral Duncan gay pub 1999.
23/08/06	<i>Stages of Sound: The Armour of Immanuel</i>	Edson Burton	“Winnie’s son Immanuel was murdered ... in a road rage incident.”
24/08/06	<i>The Tank Man</i>	Julia Stoneham	Hairdresser builds a memorial to WWII tank fiasco.
25/08/06	<i>The January Wedding</i>	Beatrice Colin	Marriage of political expediency, Poland, 1960s.
No Afternoon Play, Bank Holiday Monday August 28			
29/08/06	<i>Keeping the Score</i>	Martyn Wade	What Gerald does in the winter in the village cricket score box.
30/08/06	<i>Long Road to Iona</i>	Janette Walkinshaw	“a feisty, elderly widow” leaves home for adventure.
31/08/06	<i>Darkness</i>	D J Britton	Surgeon Dan is going blind.
01/09/06	<i>The Little Queen of England (R)</i>	Rob John	Comedy. “Harriet wants to play fantastic games but her parents can’t quite hit the balance.”
04/09/06	<i>Hole</i>	Ed Talfan	Welsh businessman kidnapped in Tbilisi, 2002.
05/09/06	<i>The Mironov Legacy</i>	Helen Dunmore	Helen Mirren’s Russian ancestry.
06/09/06	<i>Teacher’s Pet (R)</i>	Robert Shearman	“teacher and pupil have had a remarkable influence on each other’s lives...” Dark comedy.
07/09/06	<i>The Psychology of Dangerous Roads</i>	David Calcutt	Writer with OCD. Dramatisation of Gul Y Davis.
08/09/06	<i>Soldiers’ Loves and Soldiers’ Lives (R)</i>	Roy Apps	Dramatised memoir of Sgt Bill Jupe, 1920s Brighton.
11/09/06	<i>Blue Moon Over Poplar</i>	Rebecca Lenkiewicz	1955: “five girls and one guy experience love, lust and heartache...”
12/09/06	<i>Mike and Muriel Are Getting Married</i>	Nicholas Meiklejohn	Andy and Rebecca try to stop Mike and Muriel...
13/09/06	<i>The Lost Boys</i>	Andrew Birkin	J M Barrie and the Llewelyn-Davies brothers.
14/09/06	<i>Monkeyface</i>	Linda Marshall Griffiths	8-year-old and sister decide to find their father.
15/09/06	<i>Kind Hearts</i>	Andy Rashleigh	The making of Ealing comedy

			<i>Kind Hearts and Coronets.</i>
18/09/06	<i>Travel Sick (R)</i>	Trevor Lock Sem Devillart	Hypochondriac journeys to Peru in search of love.
19/09/06	<i>So Long, Sleeping Beauty</i>	Isobel Mahon	Widow finds husband's love letters to another man.
20/09/06	<i>Uncovering Iran: The Interview</i>	Arash Aryan Ava Mandan	Roxana's annual interview to test how Islamic she is.
21/09/06	<i>The Glass Man (R)</i>	Martin Sorrell	Young man develops Glass Delusion. Drama documentary.
22/09/06	<i>Angelophany</i>	Miles Gibson	Anarchic angel deconstructs Christianity.
25/09/06	<i>Moving Day (R)</i>	Alexandra Campbell	Two moving couples receive the wrong belongings.
26/09/06	<i>Water Lens (R)</i>	Dominique Moloney	Young homeless girl befriended by middleclass Tara.
27/09/06	<i>Baguettes and Barms</i>	Christine Marshall	Woman prepares meal for husband's inauguration as Worshipful Master of Lodge.
28/09/06	<i>Mum</i>	Ronnie Barker	Adaptation. Woman talks to dead mother. Tragi-comedy.
29/09/06	<i>The Last Days of Gordon Springer (R)</i>	Richard Stevens	IT manager accesses workplace secrets.
02/10/06	<i>The Inextinguishable Fire</i>	Zosia Wand	Joseph Conrad returns to Poland, 1914.
03/10/06	<i>Palm Therapy (R)</i>	Sharon Shrubbsall	Musical comedy. 30 th birthday changed by botanical gift.
04/10/06	<i>Dreaming in Africa (R)</i>	Mike Harris	"Stewart Gore-Brown, the only white man to receive a state funeral in a black African country."
05/10/06	<i>Mrs Boston (R)</i>	Alan Drury	As his wife dies in hospital Andrew meets a stranger he can confide in.
06/10/06	<i>A Woman in Dark Times</i>	Penny Leicester Emma Harding ⁱ	Drama documentary. Love of Jewish student and Nazi philosopher Martin Heidegger.
09/10/06	<i>A Tiger for Malgudi</i>	Ronald Frame	Centenary dramatisation. An ageing tiger reflects on his life.
10/10/06	<i>Paul and Yolande</i>	Linda Grant	Paul Robeson's upper class white lover, Yolande Jackson.
11/10/06	<i>Eight Frames A Second</i>	Gary Bleasdale	"a pivotal week in the life of William Friese-Greene."
12/10/06	<i>Afternoon Romancers</i>	Nick McCarty	"A man and a younger woman embark on an affair..."
13/10/06	<i>Coelocanth</i>	Ben Moor	Love and competitive tree climbing.
16/10/06	<i>Like An Animal (R)</i>	Meic Povey	"Mair wants to move to a new bungalow to end her days but Defi wants to stay in their mountain farmhouse..."
17/10/06	<i>Cats and Monkeys</i>	Catherine Shepherd	"A comedy about one woman's unsolicited spiritual journey."
18/10/06	<i>It's Not You</i>	Simon Burt	"It's a perfect holiday romance. Until they meet again ... in the

i Producer/directors

			wrong place.”
19/10/06	<i>Books</i>	Tessa Hadley	Researcher and dead novelist’s papers.
20/10/06	<i>Fridays When It Rains</i>	Nick Warburton	“a ghost story from the age of steam.”
23/10/06	<i>Beast (R)</i> ^j	Nick Warburton	“Somewhere near a small fishing village a creature is pulled out of the sea.”
24/10/06	<i>Mixed Blood (R)</i> ^k	Nazrin Choudhury	Young British Asian woman realises her father might be white
25/10/06	<i>My Blue Heaven</i>	Lawrence Marks Maurice Gran	Graham “realises he’s being interviewed for a job by his imaginary friend from childhood.”
26/10/06	<i>Born for War</i>	David Pownall	“A tense drama set around the Suez crisis of 1956.”
27/10/06	<i>Sand</i>	Tilly Black	10-year-old records the events of Suez in her holiday diary.
30/10/06	<i>Skomer</i>	Mike Akers	“Nick, depressed and haunted by dreams, is persuaded by Rachel to go camping in Wales.”
31/10/06	<i>Adrift (R)</i>	Judy Upton	“one young woman’s struggle to confront her past...”
01/11/06	<i>From Abstraction</i>	Robert Thoroughgood	“Paul is young, rich and in love. So why does he lock himself in the library...?”
02/11/06	<i>Over Night</i>	Gary Owen	“two divorced 40-somethings meet at Bellbottoms, the club where the 1970s never died.”
03/11/06	<i>How to Lose Friends and Alienate People</i>	Toby Young	Author’s “disastrous sojourn in New York.”
06/11/06	<i>Mummies and Daddies</i>	Rony Robinson	“told through song and drama ... about the experience of being a teenage parent.”
07/11/06	<i>Side Effects</i>	Louise Gooding	Separated father in roof-top protest.
08/11/06	<i>Dr Brighton and Mr Harding (R)</i>	Stephen Wyatt	“the personal demons [of] TV’s first superstar ... Gilbert Harding.”
09/11/06	<i>Esterhazy</i>	Peter Nichols	Harpenden 1923: “the Count de Voilement was a mysterious figure whose true identity only emerged after his death...”
10/11/06	<i>Hard Frosts in Florence (R)</i>	David Pownall	Ageing Michelangelo revisits his statue of David.
13/11/06	<i>Return to Killroe</i>	John P Rooney	“Paddo is persuaded to make one final trip to his native Ireland.”
14/11/06	<i>Upside Down and Back to Front</i>	Lance Woodman	Travelling photographer in Worcestershire, 1913.
15/11/06	<i>The Word Man</i>	Chris Harrald	Lexicographer Henry Fowler.
16/11/06	<i>Donna and the Debonair Diner</i>	Cathy Feeny	“A sparky 16-year-old waitress and a jaded restaurant critic...”
17/11/06	<i>A Breath From Other Planets (R)</i>	Marty Ross	Arnold Schoenberg, Vienna, 1907-8.

j Winner of the Peter Tinniswood Award 2006.

k Winner of the Richard Imison Award 2006.

20/11/06	<i>McNaughton</i> (R) ^l	Steve Gooch	The man whose 1843 trial prompted the McNaughton Rules
21/11/06	<i>Motel Texel</i>	Marjolein Beriens	Iranian refugee woman abandoned in Holland.
22/11/06	<i>Forever Mine</i> (R)	Robert Shearman	"A comedy of relationships..."
23/11/06	<i>None of the Above</i>	Christopher Green	Three linked plays about gender reassignment.
24/11/06	<i>Old Man Goya</i> (R)	Julia Blackburn	Goya coping with deafness.
27/11/06	<i>Out of Season</i>	Annie-Marie O'Connor	Blackpool: "Four locals escape the biting wind in an empty promenade café."
28/11/06	<i>The Lost Love of Phoebe Mills</i>	Bernard Kops	"A young woman ... in wartime London, falls in love with a young American serviceman."
29/11/06	<i>Cut Out</i>	Colleen Muldoon-Taylor	14-year-old "victimised at school because his parents are a lesbian couple."
30/11/06	<i>The Scarlet Pimpernel of the Vatican</i>	Robin Glendinning	War criminal visited in prison by the Monsignor he tried to kill.
01/12/06	<i>Wooden Heart</i> (R)	Hattie Naylor	1974 Swiss government forcibly removes Gypsy children from their parents.
04/12/06	<i>Regressed</i>	Chris Sussman Dan Hine	Therapist dies before he can bring Leo back from childhood.
05/12/06	<i>Every Book in the World</i>	Nick Warburton	Victorian bibliomaniac Sir Thomas Phillipps.
06/12/06	<i>The Malingerer's Manual</i> (R)	Gary Ogin	"Is there ever anything you wish you could get out of?"
07/12/06 08/12/06	<i>Agatha Christie's Dumb Witness</i> (2 eps)	Michael Bakewell	Dramatisation. Poirot.
11/12/06	<i>Mother Spy</i>	John Fletcher	Janet Chisholm, "housewife and mother of three who smuggled Khrushchev's nuclear secrets out of Moscow."
12/12/06	<i>Reans Girls</i>	Kaite O'Reilly	Adaptation.m In 1973 women who have emigrated to Wolverhampton tell their stories.
13/12/06	<i>Chocolate Frigate</i> (R)	Juliet Ace	Chef Jack prepares dinner for his Captain while his son serves in Iraq.
14/12/06 15/12/06	<i>Heart Transplant</i> (2 eps) (R)	Jonathan Holloway	The story of the first transplant, Cape Town, December 1967.
18/12/06	<i>This Is My Car Park</i>	Mark Tuohy	Homeless man refuses to leave car park.
19/12/06	<i>Martha My Dear</i>	Annie McCartney	Confidante writes steamy best seller.
20/12/06	<i>Standing Sideways</i>	Matt Charman	"a woman dealing with ... personal space phobia."
21/12/06	<i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>	Simon Armitage	Dramatisation of Armitage's new translation of medieval poem.
22/12/06	<i>Fly Girls</i>	D J Britton	Comedy: "two girls' lives are changed forever when they fall in love with the trapeze."

^l Best radio play, The Writers' Guild Awards 2007
^m Originally created by the Foursight Theatre Company.

25/12/06	<i>McLevy</i>	David Ashton	Season case for Victorian Inspector.
27/12/06	<i>Edward Alleyn's Devil</i>	Nicola Baldwin	Elizabethan ghost story.
28/12/06	<i>The Autobiography of a Nobody</i>	Ian Kershaw	"A bittersweet comedy about lonely people at Christmas..."
29/12/06	<i>Late</i>	Dan Sefton	Comedy. Four New Year's Eves in a 20-year marriage.

Serials and Series – Radio 4, various days and times, all four 30-minute episodes except where indicated.

03/02/06	<i>Gilbert Without Sullivan (R)</i>	Stephen Wyatt	Dramatised from W S Gilbert comic stories.
13/02/06	<i>Jigsaw</i>	Melissa Murray	Dramatised Sybille Bedford novel about girl growing up in Europe between the wars.
28/02/06	<i>Small Gods</i>	Robin Brooks	Terry Pratchett Discworld dramatisation.
03/03/06	<i>Agatha Christie's Mrs McGinty's Dead (5 eps)</i>	Michael Bakewell	Poirot 1952 – dramatisation.
01/05/06	<i>Life in London (6 eps)</i>	Dan Tetsell	Pierce Egan dramatisation.
19/05/06	<i>Falco: Venus in Copper (6 eps)</i>	Mary Cutler	Lindsey Davis dramatisation. Detective in ancient Rome.
30/06/06	<i>My Turn to Make the Tea (R)</i>	Sheila Goff	Dramatisation of Monica Dickens novel about junior reporter in 1950s.
10/07/06	<i>Jack Rosenthal's Last Act</i>	Amy Rosenthal	Adaptation of father's scripted memoir.
19/07/06	<i>Dixon of Dock Green (6 eps)</i>	Sue Rodwell	Adapted Ted Willis TV scripts.
07/08/06	<i>Paul Temple and the Sullivan Mystery (8 eps)</i>	Francis Durbridge	Revival of classic amateur detective serial.
30/08/06	<i>A Charles Paris Mystery: Sicken and So Die</i>	Jeremy Front	"Charles has landed a part in <i>Twelfth Night</i> but it seems there's a poisoner on the loose." Dramatisation of Simon Brett.
09/10/06	<i>The Eliza Stories (5 eps) (R)</i>	Jonathan Dryden Taylor	Dramatisation of Barry Pain, 1900. Comedy of pompous husband.
25/10/06	<i>Agatha Raisin: The Murderous Marriage (6 eps)</i>	David Semple	Dramatised from M C Beaton novel about "female amateur sleuth."
07/11/06	<i>Ruth Rendell's The Fever Tree (3 eps)</i>	Yvonne Antrobus	"A short series of murderous thrillers." Dramatisation.
13/11/06	<i>The Eliza Stories (5 eps)</i>	Jonathan Dryden Taylor	See above.
06/12/06	<i>The Little World of Don Camillo: Soul for Sale (R)</i>	Peter Kerry	Dramatisation of Giovanni Guareschi. Italian village with "the priest and the communist mayor in perpetual combat..."

Specials – Radio 4, various times.

13/07/06	<i>The Road, the House, the Road</i> (60)	Howard Barker	"A new philosophical tragedy", commissioned to mark the playwright's 60 th birthday.
26/12/06	<i>Great Scott</i> (30)	Steve Bell Hugh Card	Scott's doomed expedition, recorded by penguins and "given a new twist by global warming."

The Wire – Radio 3 Thursday evening 10.00, season of repeats Saturday, various times.
45 minutes except where indicated.

05/01/06	<i>Miscreant Mothers</i>	Rebecca Papworth	"an odyssey of reckless behaviour ... modern fairy tale."
02/02/06	<i>Babble</i>	Glenn Patterson	"Skinny is sent to plant a flag on Belfast's tallest unlit bonfire on the 11 th night."
02/03/06	<i>Not Talking</i> (60) n	Mike Bartlett	"explores the corrosive power of silence" in military context.
04/05/06	<i>Last Suppers</i> (60)	Pearse Elliott	Chef on Death Row.
01/06/06	<i>Donna Love Bite</i> (60)	Gill Adams	"three kids go on a coastal ride to Hull, Hell and back."
06/07/06	<i>Kitty Elizabeth Must Die</i>	Louise Ironside	"Debt-ridden Angie will do whatever it takes to have her own child." Black comedy.
15/07/06	<i>Not Talking</i> (60) (R)	Mike Bartlett	See above.
22/07/06	<i>Miscreant Mothers</i> (R)	Rebecca Papworth	See above.
05/08/06	<i>Dead Code: Ghosts of the Digital Age</i> (R)	Jeff Noon	Post-digital dystopia.
12/08/06	<i>Stone Baby</i> (R)	Sean Buckley	Lonely boy with "something inside. Someone."
19/08/06	<i>Iona</i> (R)	Rhiannon Tise	"Andrew's longing to recapture a lost life and love leads him on a bizarre search of the surreal."
26/08/06	<i>It's Enough to Believe You're in Danger</i> (R)	Michael Butts	The myths surrounding the Gibraltar shootings.
02/09/06	<i>Medium Risk</i> (R)	Mark Norfolk	Sex offender. Missing child.
14/09/06	<i>Quarantine</i> (60)	Jeff Young	Solitary leaflet deliverer and his 73-year-old agoraphobic date.
05/10/06	<i>Stripped – a Life in Bank Statements</i> (55)	Stefan Weigl	Author confronts his financial meltdown with the help of his talking bank statement.
02/11/06	<i>DJs, Doormen and Dealers</i>	Jeffrey Caffrey	"thriller set in a Manchester nightclub where ... everyone's a millionaire for the weekend."

n Co-winner Peter Tinniswood Award 2007, winner Imison Award 2007

Friday Play – Radio 4, Friday evening 9.00, 60 minutes

06/01/06	<i>You Need Changing</i>	Jackie Pavienko	Drama doc set in prison mother and baby unit
13/01/06	<i>Wouldn't It Be Better If He Died In The End? (R)</i>	Laurence Allan	"Can TV ever let the truth get in the way of a good story?"
20/01/06	<i>Strike</i>	Amanda Dalton	Kat's been self-harming since father disappeared.
27/01/06	<i>The Reign of Joseph Cain (R)</i>	Dominique Moloney	Black comedy. Autocratic father makes surprise announcement.
03/02/06	<i>Fragments</i>	Julian Simpson	Teenager Kelly murders 70-year-old retired Marine. Why?
10/02/06	<i>Almost Blue</i>	Judith Adams	Dramatised Carlo Lucarelli thriller. Blind man in Bologna.
17/02/06	<i>Pick-Up (R)</i>	Ken Blakeson	Charlie (44) yearns for a change of lifestyle...
24/02/06	<i>Zero</i>	Olivia Hetreed	"Julia was raped during the Balkan conflict of the 1990s and had a son, Zero." Dramatisation of <i>Music for the Third Ear</i> by Susan Schwartz Senstad.
03/03/06	<i>Crossing the Line</i>	Terry Cafolla	When murder suspect walks free, Jackie takes matters into her own hands.
10/03/06	<i>After the Affair</i>	Michael Butt	"play-without-a-script dissects ... an extra-marital affair."
17/03/06	<i>Unprotected</i>	Ether Wilson John Fey etco	Responses to Government proposals on street prostitution based on interviews with those most involved.
24/03/06	<i>Metropolis</i>	Peter Straughan	Dramatisation of Thea von Harbou's 1926 novel/1927 film.
31/03/06	<i>First Born</i>	John Godber	Jack "made good the hard way but now his daughter's growing up soft."
07/04/06	<i>Milosevic in Black and White (R)</i>	Peter Morgan	"combining documentary interviews with the confessions of a fictional henchman..."
14/04/06	<i>London, This is Washington</i>	Mark Lawson	Harold Macmillan meets JFK. Harold Wilson meets LBJ.
21/04/06	<i>The Incompatibility of Memory with the Pursuit of a New Life</i>	Neil Griffiths	Woman falls for the man she knocked down. But he has total amnesia.
28/04/06	<i>The Inland Sea (R)</i>	Jane Rogers	Snakebite in Outback leads couple to explore "the darker side of their complicated relationship."
05/05/06	<i>Connecting: The World in My Ear</i>	Paul Farley	Mp3 accident sends man to radio heaven.
12/05/06	<i>Another Place</i>	Mark Davies	Steve returns to Liverpool. Ray

o "By Esther Wilson, John Fay, Lizzie Nunnery and Tony Green ... interweaves verbatim monologues ... Created in conjunction with the Everyman and Liverpool Playhouse Theatre."

			never left.
19/05/06	<i>I Was Born There (R)</i>	Ellen Dryden	"When Judith finds the clumsy little painting of her childhood home, the nightmares begin..."
26/05/06	<i>Abrogate</i>	Larry Gelbart	President Hilary Clinton investigates Bush regime. "Merciless lampoon."
02/06/06	<i>The Third Soldier Holds His Thighs (R)</i>	Mark Lawson	Drama documentary. 1980s obscenity trial of <i>Romans in Britain</i> .
09/06/06	<i>Caravan of Desire</i>	Rebecca Lenkiewicz	Love story set among illegal immigrants in Hackney.
16/06/06	<i>Chess Wars (R)</i>	Steve May	Fischer v Spassky 1972.
23/06/06	<i>Consideration</i>	Robert Messik	Woman sues unfaithful husband for return of donated kidney.
30/03/06	<i>The Price of Light (R)</i>	Hilary Mantel	Mesmer tries to cure blind musical prodigy.
07/07/06	<i>Family Cover (R)</i>	Jonathan Holloway	Swedish police investigate death of Emma's husband.
14/07/06	<i>Lorilei</i>	Thomas Wright	True story. Louisiana mother testifies to keep son's killer from Death Row.
21/07/06	<i>The Appeal</i>	Matthew Solon	Drama documentary set in asylum appeal court.
28/07/06	<i>The Memory Experience: Last Loves (R)</i>	Rony Robinson	"love among the elderly in a residential home..."
04/08/06	<i>The Good Father (R)</i>	Christian O'Reilly	Consequences of one night stand.
11/08/06	<i>Mr Sex (R)</i>	Steve Coombs	Kinsey and his report.
18/08/06	<i>Twenty Cigarettesp</i>	Marcy Kahan	Comedy about stopping smoking.
25/08/06	<i>Nightmares (R)</i>	Dave Simpson	Psychological thriller. Woman suffers recurring nightmare.
01/09/06	<i>In the Bosom of the Family (R)</i>	Melissa Murray	Mary Rose's wicked sisters produce her long lost son.
08/09/06	<i>The Unexpected European</i>	Various	"Six mini-dramas from European radio, providing a snapshot of Europe's perception of itself today."
15/09/06	<i>Black Wednesday</i>	Peter G Morgan	Britain drops out of European Exchange Rate Mechanism 1992.
22/09/06	<i>Swimming Lessons (R)</i>	Tina Pepler	"Grace is locked into a long-term battle with her loving but angry family over her anorexia."
29/09/06	<i>The Great Escape (R)</i>	Katie Douglas	Shopworkers rebel against consumerism. Satirical comedy.
06/10/06	<i>Empty Bed Blues</i>	Stephen Lowe	D H Lawrence in America 1929.
13/10/06	<i>Walking the Line</i>	Stephen Phelps	Drama documentary about prison officers and their families.
20/10/06	<i>Three Days That Shook the World</i>	Penny Gold	"the attempted coup against Mikhail Gorbachev in August 1991."
27/10/06	<i>Broken English</i>	Frank Deasy	Kurdish family detained in Scottish detention centre.
03/11/06	<i>A Conspiracy at Sevres</i>	Charles Wood	"uncovers an illicit pact that

p Nominated for the Peter Tinniswood Award 2007

			ignited the Suez crisis..."
10/11/06	<i>Beyond the Thundercloud</i>	Nicola McCartney	Drama documentary created with children from the Caucasus and central Russia.
17/11/06	<i>The Loss Adjuster</i>	Richard Monks	Loss adjuster uncovers planning conspiracy.
24/11/06	<i>Safe (R)</i>	Tracy Spottiswoode	"Ansh is only 13 years old when she witnesses a murder."
01/12/06	<i>Folie a Trois (R)</i>	Sarah Wooley	"Three Scottish women living in the same house become delusional..."
08/12/06	<i>Talking to Strangers</i>	Charlotte Jones	"A perennially shy man decides to ... talk to strangers."
15/12/06	<i>The Monkey's Mask</i>	Dorothy Porter	Dramatisation of Dorothy Porter verse novel about female private investigator.
22/12/06	<i>The National Theatre of Brent's Messiah</i>	Patrick Barlow	Spoof. "Including, probably for the first time ... the actual birth of a baby by two men."
No Friday Play 29/12/06			

Appendix 9: Output of *Worldplay* countries June 2006

a. CBC Canada: *Sunday Showcase*, CBC Radio One, 10pm, repeated as *Monday Night Playhouse*, CBC Radio Two, 9pm, 60-minute format.^a

4	<i>It Came from Beyond</i>	Beverley Cooper	<i>Conspiracy Theories</i> series
11	<i>Seeds of our Destruction</i>	Leanna Brodie	<i>Conspiracy Theories</i> series
18	<i>Waiting for Godot</i> Pt 1	Beckett centenary adaptation	
25	<i>Waiting for Godot</i> Pt 2		

b. ABC Australia: *Airplay* series, Radio National, Sundays 3pm, repeated Friday 9pm, 30-minute format.^b

4	<i>Learning to Play Bach</i>	Peter Jensen	Childhood nostalgia
11	<i>The Butcher's Wife</i> Pt 1	Noelle	Cambodian migrant to Australia
18	<i>The Butcher's Wife</i> Pt 2	Janaczewska	
25	<i>Under the Shaded Blossom</i>	John Jenkins	Based on poem by Peter Porter.

c. New Zealand Radio:^c *Sunday Drama* series, National Radio, Sundays 3pm, repeated Wednesday 9pm, 60-minute format.^d

4	<i>Gyokusai: The Breaking Jewel</i>	Tina Pepler	Adaptation of Makoto Oda's novel (BBC)
11	<i>The Gentle Art of Dying</i>	Claire Luckham	Medical docu-drama (BBC)
18	<i>Golden Goal</i>	Judith Johnson	Woman footballer (BBC)
25	<i>Metropolis</i>	Peter Straughan	Adaptation of Thea von Harbou's novel (BBC)

d. RTÉ Ireland: Radio 1, *Sunday Playhouse* 8pm, *The Tuesday Play* at 7pm^e

4	<i>Village Wooing</i> [1956]	Bernard Shaw	Shaw – 150 (60 min)
6	<i>Months Mind</i> [1992]	John McDwyer	P J O'Connor Season (30 min)
11	<i>St Joan</i> [1954]	Bernard Shaw	Shaw – 150 (155 min)
13	<i>Letting Go</i> [1994]	Ursula de Brun	P J O'Connor Season (30 min)
18	<i>Arms and the Man</i> [1976]	Bernard Shaw	Shaw – 150 (90 min)
20	<i>The Waiting Room Story</i> [1995]	Mairide Woods	P J O'Connor Season (30 min)
25	<i>Candida</i> [1977]	Bernard Shaw	Shaw – 150 (90 min)
27	<i>Blameless</i> [1988]	Nicholas Kelly	P J O'Connor Season (30 min)

^a <http://www.cbc.ca/showcase/index.html>

^b <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/airplay/about/default.htm>

^c This was also the BBC World Service *World Drama* schedule for June, broadcast at 8pm on Saturday 3, 10, 17 and 24. In the *World Drama* slot, *Golden Goal* was called *Just Like Ronaldinho*.

^d <http://www.radionz.co.nz/nr/programmes/sundaydrama>

^e <http://www.rte.ie/radio1/drama/>

Appendix 10: *Hörspiele* broadcast May 30 – June 5 2006

- Tuesday May 30 2006 *Schauspieler, Tänzer, Sängerin (r)* [New hörspiel]
 Wr. Gisela von Wysocki Dir. Ulrich Gerhardt
 Bayern 2/MUNICH 15:00 59 min
 (Original production NDR/BR/SWF 1992)
Die Kopien [Adaptation]
 Wr. Caryl Churchill Dir. Annette Berger
 WDR 5/COLOGNE 20:05 51 min
 (Original production DLR Berlin 2003)
Witwen Monolog [Drama]
 Wr. Andreas Otteneder Dir. Leonhard Koppelman
 WDR Eins Live/COLOGNE 23:00 Time nk **NEW**
- Wednesday May 31 2006 *You'll Never Walk Alone* [New hörspiel]
 Wr & dir. Alfred Behrens
 NDR/HAMBURG 20:05 Time nk **NEW**
Mordspiel [Crime]
 Wr. Holger Siemann Dir. Christa Kowalski
 Bayern 2/MUNICH 20:30 53 min
 (Original production RBB 2004)
Elsa Roth. Ein Bericht [Drama]
 Wr. Adolf Schröder Dir. Johanna Elbauer **NEW**
 DLR Kultur/BERLIN 21:33 52 min
Gräser fliegen nur noch selten [Drama]
 Wr & dir. Hermann Bohlen
 HR 2/FRANKFURT 21:33 55 min
 (Original production SWR 2005)
Die Wand/Sprachspiel [New hörspiel]
 Wr. Dieter Forte Dir. Friedhelm Ortmann
 WDR 3/COLOGNE 23:00 35 min/20 min
 Die Wand 1965 WDR mono recording
 Sprachspiel 1980 WDR recording
- Thursday June 1 2006 *Mordspiel (r)* [Crime]
 Bayern 2/MUNICH 15:00 53 min
Fallen Fälle wie sie fallen [Dramatisation]
 Wr & dir. Stefan Hardt
 SR 2 KulturRadio/SAARBRÜCKEN 20:04 55 min
 (Original production RB 1992)
Ein Romancier des Radios [Feature]
 Wr. Hans-Ulrich Wagner Dir. Hartmut Kirste
 SWR 2/STUTTGART 21:03 60 min
 (Original production SWR 2001)
Stadt der kleinen Lichter [Crime/dramatisation]
 Wr & dir. Annette Berger
 WDR Eins Live/COLOGNE 23:00 Time nk **NEW**

Friday June 2 2006

Kuckuckskind [Crime]
Wr. Andreas Knaup Dir. Klaus-Michael Klingsporn
WDR 5/COLOGNE 20:05 49 min
(Original production DLR Kultur 2005)
Tribute to Dieter Roth (1) [New *hörspiel*]
Radiosonate (SDR 1996) Dieter Roth 42 min
Radiosinatra (BR 2006) Adam Butler, Ekkehard
Ehlers 45 min approx – to be performed live
Bayern 2/MUNICH 20:30
Amoklauf mein Kinderspiel [Drama]
Wr. Thomas Freyer Dir. Ulrich Lampen
KulturRadio RBB/BERLIN BRANDENBURG 22:04
51 min
(Original production RBB/RB 2006)

Saturday June 3 2006

Kuckuckskind (r) [Crime]
WDR 5/COLOGNE 10:05
Idiotenbruder – oder: Der schwarze Hund (1)
[*Kinderhörspiel*]
Wr. Ivana Jokl Dir. Justyna Buddeberg-Mosz
Bayern 2/MUNICH 14:00 Time nk
(Original production BR 2005)
Trans DADA Express Mix (1) [New *hörspiel*]
EBU Ars Acustica Group
HR 2/FRANKFURT 23:05 55 min NEW

Sunday June 4 2006

Erich Kästner erzählt Münchhausen [*Kinderhörspiel*]
MDR Figaro/HALLE 08:05 14 min
(Original production SFB 2002)
Die Applausmaschine (1) [New *hörspiel*]
Wr. Ana Blandiana Dir. Jörg Jannings
Bayern 2/MUNICH 15:15 55 min
(Original production BR/SWF 1995)
Alles ist erleuchtet (1) [Dramatisation]
Wr & dir. Leonhard Koppelman
SWR2/STUTTGART 16:05 88 min
(Original production SWR 2004)
Das Glasperlenspiel (4) [Classic serial]
Dir. Christiane Ohaus
WDR 5/COLOGNE 17:05 52 min
(Original production HR/RB)
Die Ahnungslosen im alten Europa (1) [Dramatisation]
Wr & dir. Heinz von Cramer
DLR Kultur/BERLIN 18:30 86 min
(Original production DLR Berlin 2004)
Das Ohrauf dem Tisch [Drama]
Wr & dir. Edwin Ortmann

HR 2/FRANKFURT 20:50 97 min
 (Original production SDR/NDR 1990)
Blutschrift [Crime/dramatisation] Nk.
 MDR Figaro/HALLE 22:00 53 min
 (Original production SFB-ORB 2002)
Inspektor Jury spielt Katz und Maus [Dramatisation]
 Wr. Klaus Schmitz Dir. Hans Gerd Krogmann
 SWR 1/STUTTGART 23:03 55 min [Crime]
 (Original production by MDR 2003)

Monday June 5 2006

Die neue Melusine [Kinderhörspiel]
 MDR Figaro/HALLE 08:05 45 min
 (Original production Rundfunk der DDR 1982)
Max und Mozart [Kinderhörspiel]
 Wr. Leise Haug Dir. tbc
 DLR Kultur/BERLIN 13:30 50 min **NEW**
Der Zug nach Wicklow [Kinderhörspiel]
 Wr. Christina Calvo Dir. Stefan Kanis
 Bayern 2/MUNICH 14:00 52 min
 (Original production MDR 2003)
Faust. Mephistophiles (1) [Adaptation]
 Dramaturgs Silke Panzer and Karl-Heinz Müller
 KulturRadio RBB/BERLIN BRANDENBURG 14:04
 55 min
 (Production: Unterlauf and Zschiedrich 2005)
Mit Blindheir geschlagen (1) [Crime/dramatisation]
 Wr & dir. Norbert Schaeffer
 DLR Kultur/BERLIN 15:05 55 min **NEW**
Alles ist erleuchtet (2) [Dramatisation]
 Wr & dir. Leonhard Koppelman
 SWR 2/STUTTGART 16:05 88 min
 (Original production SWR 2004)
Das Glasperlenspiel (5) [Classic serial]
 Dir. Christiane Ohaus
 WDR 5/COLOGNE 17:03 52 min
 (Original production HR/RB)
Die Ahnungslosen im alten Europa (2) [Dramatisation]
 Wr & dir. Heinz von Cramer
 DLR Kultur/BERLIN 18:30 86 min
 (Original production DLR Berlin 2004)
Die Applausmaschine (2) [New hörspiel]
 Wr. Ana Blandiana Dir. Jörg Jannings
 Bayern 2/MUNICH 20:30 52 min
 (Original production BR/SWF 1995)
Morbus sacer [New hörspiel]
 Wr & dir. Ulrich Bassenge
 WDR 3/COLOGNE 23:03 Time nk **NEW**

Appendix 11: Comparison of BBC output Week 46 2006 and 2007

November 18-24 2006		November 17-23 2007
	<i>Saturday Play</i>	
<i>Sad Girl</i> (Sue Teddern) Original single play		<i>Fame and Fortune</i> (Frederic Raphael) Dramatised serial 4 6
	<i>Classic Serial</i>	
<i>The Brothers Karamzov</i> Dostoyevsky 3/5 (dram. Melissa Murray)		<i>Dr Zhivago</i> Pasternak 2/6 (dram. Jeremy Myerson)
	<i>Drama on 3</i>	
<i>True West</i> (Sam Shepard) Adapted stage play		<i>Mrs Warren's Profession</i> (Bernard Shaw) Adapted stage play
	<i>Woman's Hour Serial</i>	
<i>Immigration Stories</i> (Sarah Daniel) Original 5-part serial		<i>Dombey and Son</i> (Dickens: dram. Mike Walker) Dramatised 20-part serial
	<i>Afternoon Play</i>	
<i>McNaughton</i> (Steve Gooch) Original single play (repeat)		<i>Cats and Monkeys</i> (Catherine Shepherd) Original single play (repeat)
<i>Motel Texel</i> (Marjolein Beriens) Original single play		<i>A City Full of Swindlers</i> (Jennifer Howarth) Original single play
<i>Forever Mine</i> (Robert Shearman) Original single play (repeat)		<i>Stardust: a Love Story</i> (Gwyneth Lewis) Original single play
<i>None of the Above</i> (Christopher Green) Three short original plays		<i>Take-Away</i> (Leah Chillery) Series of linked originals 2/5
<i>Old Man Goya</i> (Julia Blackburn) Original single play (repeat)		<i>The Umbrella</i> (Lavinia Greenlaw) Original single play
	<i>Serials and Series</i>	
<i>Ruth Rendell's The Fever Tree</i> (3/3) (dram. Yvonne Antrobus)		None
<i>The Eliza Stories</i> (2/5) (repeat) Barry Pain (dram. Jonathan Dryden Taylor)		
	<i>The Wire</i>	
No broadcast		No broadcast
	<i>Friday Play</i>	
<i>Safe</i> (Tracy Spottiswoode) Original single play (repeat)		<i>Fame and Fortune</i> (repeat of Saturday)

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Board of Governors Minutes 1927-1930 (WAC R1/1/1)
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Entertainment, Drama Policy 1935-1936 (WAC R19/280/2)
Entertainment, Drama Policy 1937-1939 (WAC R19/280/3)
Entertainment, Drama Policy 1939-1946 (WAC R19/280/4)
Entertainment, Drama Policy 1947-1948 (WAC R19/280/5)
Entertainment, Drama Policy, File 5A 1949-1952 (WAC R19/280/6)
Entertainment, Drama Policy, File 5B 1953-1954 (WAC R19/280/7)
Entertainment, Drama Meetings, File 1 1946-1947 (WAC R19/278/1)
Entertainment, Drama Meetings, File 2 1948-1949 (WAC R19/278/2)
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Finance, Drama, File 1A 1933-1934 (WAC R20/51/1)
Herbert George Wells, Copyright File 1 1926-1935 (WAC 910)
Personal File, Copyright, Val Gielgud 1939-62
Plays, Lewis, Cecil A, File 1A 1925-April 1928
Policy, Censorship of Programmes 1929-1942 File 1 (WAC R34/275/1)
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Policy, Dramatic Criticism, 1929-1936 (WAC R34/366)
Policy, Future of Sound Broadcasting in the Domestic Services Working Party (WAC R34/1022/1)
Policy, North Region, Programme Arrangements, File 1a 1939-1942 (WAC R34/491/1)
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Policy, Programme Arrangements, Quarterly Schedules File 1a 1937-1938 (WAC R34/598/1)
Policy, Programme Arrangements, Quarterly Schedules File 1b 1939 (WAC R34/598/2)
Policy, Regional Broadcasting, File 2 1929-1939 (WAC R34/731/2)
Reports, Sound, Subjects Plays (WAC R9/64/1)

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V H Gielgud, Personal File (WAC L2/77/1)

b. Microfiche scripts, WAC, Caversham

Scripts consulted December 7 and 8 2005 and January 19 2006.

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MASON, Edward J, and WEBB, Geoffrey (1951) *The Archers*, "Trial" episode and Episode 1, Monday January 1.
WELLS, H G (1946 revival) *The Man Who Could Work Miracles* (dram. Laurence Gilliam)
ANON (1948) *Mrs Dale's Diary*, Episode 1, Monday January 5.

c. National Sound Archive

Plays listened to at the British Library October 11 2006 and December 7 2006.

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BRIDSON, D G (1939) *Aaron's Field* (1947 revival). T6596WR BD1.
BRIDSON, D G (1951) *The Childermass* (later revised and revived as Part 1 of *The Human Age*). 1CDR0000703 NSA and 1CDR0000704 NSA.
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d. Other archival recordings of plays

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e. Video

Invasion from Mars: How Orson Welles Panicked a Nation (1988). BBC for the Open University.

3. Internet resources

a. International broadcasters

The websites of the major public service broadcasters of radio drama have been accessed countless times during the course of this study. Below are their drama webpages, all accessed for verification May 7 2007.

ARD: <http://www.ard.de/radio/hoerspiel-lesung/>

See also *Hörspiel-Archiv* at <http://web.ard.de/radio/dra/search.php>.

ABC National Radio, Australia: <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/airplay/>

See also: The Listening Room: <http://www.abc.net.au/classic/listeningroom/> but note that this has been archived as a historical document after December 2003 and not all audio links still work.

Bayern2Radio: <http://www.br-online.de/kultur-sz.de/hoerspiel/>

BBC Radio 3: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/speechanddrama/>

BBC Radio 4: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/arts/>

BBC World Service:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/programmes/world_drama.shtml

CBC: <http://www.cbc.ca/showcase/index.html>

DR (Deutschlandradio Kultur): <http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/sendungen/hoerspiel/>

DR (Deutschlandfunk): <http://www.dradio.de/dlf/sendungen/hoerspiel/>

HR2: <http://www.hr-online.de/website/radio/hr2/>

MDR Figaro: <http://www.mdr.de/mdr-figaro/hoerspiel/>

NDR: <http://www1.ndr.de/kultur/hoerspiele/>

Nordwestradio: <http://www.radiobremen.de/nordwestradio/hoerspiel/>

Radio France (France Culture) <http://www.radiofrance.fr/chaines/france-culture/sites/fictions/calend.php>

RBB Kulturradio: <http://www.kulturradio.de/>

Radio New Zealand: <http://www.radionz.co.nz/nr/programmes/sundaydrama>

RTÉ Radio 1: <http://www.rte.ie/radio1/drama.html>

SR2: <http://www.sr-online.de/sr2/552/>

SWR2: <http://www.swr.de/swr2/hoerspiel/index.html>

WDR (WDR3, WDR5 and 1 Live): <http://www.wdr.de/radio/hoerspiel/>

XM satellite radio (Sonic Theater):

http://www.xmradio.com/onxm/channelguide.xmc?ch=sonic_theater

b. Independent producers of radio drama

The Colonial Radio Theater: <http://www.colonialradio.com/> [Accessed June 20 2006].

Fresh FM: <http://www.freshfm.net>. [Accessed May 7 2007].

LA Theatre Works: <http://www.latw.org> [Accessed June 20 2006].

Lodestone Contemporary Audio Theater: <http://www.lodestone-media.com> [Accessed June 20 2006].

New Radio and Performing Arts Inc (formerly New American Radio):
<http://somewhere.org/NAR/index.htm> [Accessed June 20 2006].

The One Act Players: <http://www.oneact.org/> [Accessed June 20 2006].

Radio Repertory Company of America: <http://rrca.com> [Accessed June 20 2006].

c. Various

BBC RADIO INTERNATIONAL: <http://www.bbcradioint.com>. BBC Worldwide Ltd. [Accessed May 8 2007]

See also: <http://www.bbcradioint.com/spokenWord.aspx>

http://www.bbcradioint.com/ContentFiles/SW_Drama_Catalogue.pdf

BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE: <http://screenonline.org.uk>. [Accessed August 10 2005].

BRITISH LIBRARY: <http://www.britishlibrary.org>. [Accessed May 1 2007]

BROADCASTING COMMISSION OF IRELAND (BCI) <http://www.bci.ie> [Accessed September 20 2007]

CANADIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA: <http://www.historica.ca>. [Accessed April 18 2005].

CLAYBOURNE (Sci Fi serial): <http://claybourne.thepostnetwork.com>. [Accessed April 10 2007].

COMMUNITY RADIO FORUM OF IRELAND (CRAOL) <http://www.craol.ie/>

Stations with drama output September 2007:

Connemara Community Radio: <http://craol.ie/cms/publish/connemararadio.shtml>

Flirt FM: <http://craol.ie/cms/publish/flirtfm.shtml>

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<http://www.geocities.com/emruf8/empire.html>. [Accessed May 10 2007].

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GENERIC RADIO WORKSHOP OTR SCRIPT LIBRARY:

<http://www.genericradio.com/>. [Accessed May 8 2007].

GREGORY WHITEHEAD: <http://gregorywhitehead.com>. [Accessed May 8 2007].

HENRY REED, "Critical and biographical information for the poet, radio dramatist, and translator...": <http://www.solearabiantree.net/namingofparts/home.html>. [Accessed May 8 2007].

HISTORY OF RADIO DRAMA IN NEW ZEALAND:

http://www.tki.org.nz/r/arts_drama_radio_history_e.php. Te Kete Ipurangi. Wellington, New Zealand Ministry of Education. [Accessed May 8 2007]

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, International Film Festival 2005:

<http://hrw.org/iff2005/london/>. [Accessed May 7 2007]

INDEPENDENT RADIO DRAMA PRODUCTIONS: <http://www.irdp.co.uk>. [Accessed May 8 2007]

INTERNET BROADWAY DATABASE: <http://www.ibdb.com>. [Accessed December 1 2004].

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